

Charting a Course for Future Transportation Programs

TRB meeting addresses social and environmental concerns

Sparked by concern among TRB committees that social, economic, and environmental considerations be included in future transportation planning, the Committee on Citizen Participation in Transportation Planning, along with the Transportation Systems Planning and Administration Group Council, invited several speakers to present their views on future transportation problems and priorities during the 67th TRB Annual Meeting.

Addressing the joint meeting were Joan Claybrook, Public Citizen; John Rather, American Association of Retired Persons; John Holtzclaw, Sierra Club; and Ronald White, American Lung Association. The common theme expressed by the speakers was the need for greater emphasis on using transit systems in the future, particularly rail, and downplaying the use of the private automobile for transportation.

Ensure Mobility for All

Transportation systems need to be designed "for all the people—young and old, rich and poor—not just the best and the brightest," said Joan Claybrook, who also urged that a single organizational structure be adopted for national transportation safety programs. Citing bridges, traffic control, and the highway-vehicle interface as major problems of the future, she stressed the need for (a) antilock brakes for heavier and longer trucks; (b) greater movement of cargo by rail rather than road; (c) reinstitution of motorcycle helmet laws, and an increase in seat belt usage (only 45 percent of the population use seat belts) and in the use of child restraints; (d) reduction in the number

and severity of motor vehicle accidents by improving side-impact resistance of vehicles (9,000 deaths per year) and pedestrian protection (8,000 to 9,000 deaths per year); and (e) expanded programs to identify defective automobiles. Claybrook's final suggestion was that alternatives to the private automobile must continue to be offered to maintain personal mobility.

Fewer Automobiles Mean Cleaner Air

Representing the Sierra Club, John Holtzclaw reiterated the need for providing alternatives to the automobile. He noted that petroleum reserves are limited, valuable wetlands and farmlands are being wasted with highway-fed suburban sprawl, and air pollution from automobile exhaust kills thousands of Americans a year.

Federal transportation funds have favored highways and automobiles over transit by more than 8 to 1. Yet transit, compared with automobiles, consumes one-fifth to one-third as much fuel per passenger mile. One lane of rapid transit carries as many passengers as 24 lanes of automobiles and 1 lane of buses as much as 6 lanes of automobiles. Holtzclaw indicated that the Sierra Club would like to see full cost pricing of automobile use. Gas and automobile sales taxes, licensing and registration fees, and tolls from toll roads should recoup from society the full cost for roads. These taxes and fees should be used to compensate cities, counties, and states for their costs and to build transit systems, especially rail.

Ronald White voiced similar concerns

about the environment. He estimated that 140 million people breathe unclean air. Although there have been reductions of 25 percent in carbon monoxide, 88 percent in lead, and 30 percent in nitrogen oxides, these reductions will be eliminated if the number of vehicle miles of travel in urban areas continues to increase. The hidden financial incentives of using the automobile must be reduced, and alternative settlement and work patterns must be considered in order to reduce the demand for automobile transportation.

Widen the Transit Network for an Aging Suburban Population

With the aging of the suburban as well as the urban population, a wide transit network will be needed for the poor, the frail, and those no longer competent to drive, in the opinion of John Rather. There are 45 million people over 50 who account for 50 percent of total travel and 72 percent of recreational vehicle use. Persons over 50 are the fastest-growing age group, with the number of 80- to 85-year-olds increasing at three to four times the rate of the general population.

Older people in the suburbs will continue to remain independent and live in their own homes. The number of disabled and handicapped persons will continue to grow. One in five over 65 has some degree of disability; for those over 85, this increases to 50 percent. Lack of transportation is a major health issue. Rather warned that housing and social services must be integrated with adequate transportation if the aged are to be kept out of institutions.