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# Development of a National Transportation Policy

## The Process and the Product

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*Editor's note: One of the major events in U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Samuel K. Skinner's first year in office was the release of a National Transportation Policy Statement. In this article, some of the key architects of that policy summarize the motives behind the policy, the process that was followed, and the product that resulted. Readers are invited to submit their comments on the policy and the resulting process for publication in a future issue of TR News.*

The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Transportation Policy was first introduced by U.S. DOT Secretary Samuel K. Skinner in an address at the Annual Meeting of the Transportation Research Board in January 1990. The policy, a set of guidelines for transportation officials, provides a framework within which all levels of government and the private sector can work to ensure the quality transportation system needed for our nation's sustained economic growth and improved quality of life.

Why develop a policy at all? How was it prepared? Will it be carried out? What are the useful lessons from the exercise of the past year?

This article on the development, preparation, and initial implementation of the National Transportation Policy (1), along with insights gained over the past year, will answer these questions and others and present some views on a sound policy for the future.

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### Why Develop a Policy?

Transportation is an important element within the overall economy. It represents about one-fifth of consumer expenditures and involvement of 10 percent of the nation's work force. The policies of the U.S. DOT, which has a work force of more than 110,000 and a budget close to \$30 billion, affect virtually all U.S. citizens and businesses. The need for such an agency to provide a sound, contemporary, multimodal policy thrust was clear.

Another factor bearing on the development of the new policy was the need for legislation on the future direction of the major federal transportation programs. The bulk of DOT's budget consists of funding for aviation, mass transit, highways, and highway safety; authorizations for all of these programs will soon expire. A comprehensive, unified policy is needed to address these and other modal issues.

Finally, DOT has a loosely knit organizational structure consisting of the offices of the several modal administrations and the assistant secretaries. Among the major objectives of this policy exercise were to pull together these elements, to create a common purpose, and to

foster cross-modal cooperation and coordination.

Timing played a key role in launching this new program. Using the first year of the administration's term for policy development gave Secretary Skinner time to formulate a course of action while deferring many specific responses. History shows that policy statements issued in the closing days of the term of an administration have little or no lasting impact. This policy statement was issued early, allowing administrators time to work on its implementation.

### Policy Principles

The federal government should focus its attention on compelling national interests that government participation can advance. Federal programs and policies should be

- Designed to contribute to attaining national goals,
- Based on cost-effective use of resources in relation to public benefits,
- Responsive to market needs and based on market principles,
- Directed at accounting for effects such as safety or environment that are not adequately reflected in prices in the marketplace,
- Equitable in dealing with the various modes and forms of transportation, and
- Flexible enough to address varying circumstances and needs.



***"History must record that we took charge of our destiny and left a new generation with a better environment, a higher quality of life, and greater opportunities. To achieve this goal, transportation and transportation policy can be—must be—a vital agency for change."***

*—George Bush  
President of the United States*

## **Investing in Transportation**

Transportation officials need to convey more effectively to elected officials and the public the importance of transportation to the economic well-being of the nation. The political will must be called on to provide adequate resources at all levels of government and the private sector to support the infrastructure base essential for economic growth. Investments, like those in transportation, education, and technology, will provide for the long-term advancement of this nation.

As important as our infrastructure base is, however, the transport modes cannot operate effectively when they are encumbered by unnecessary and nonuniform rules and regulations. Since 1978, there have been significant developments in the deregulation of airline, trucking, railroad, and intercity bus industries, with resulting lower costs for shippers and passengers. But more can be done to eliminate restrictive regulations that ham-

per competition and productivity. The market must operate more openly. Transport laws, regulations, and programs must be guided by free market principles.

The policy statement is grounded in a set of fundamental precepts. During its development, concepts and policy guidelines were applied evenhandedly across the modes, providing a "level playing field" so that the modes could achieve their optimum share of the market. Modal integration and connectivity were key concepts in the development of this comprehensive strategy.

## **Policy Development Process**

The process was patterned after the classic strategic planning model (2). First, the external factors influencing transportation were examined and a background document was published (3). Second, an extensive outreach to state and local governments, transportation groups, the academic community, and the public was undertaken. Third, an examination of the internal DOT capabilities was conducted. Fourth, an extensive examination of each transportation mode was carried out as part of a comprehensive congressionally mandated study (4). The experiences gained from similar strategic assessments, such as those undertaken at the California and Pennsylvania departments of transportation, aided the policy development process.

To provide overall management, the Secretary established a policy guidance group of senior officials. In addition, a policy development team of analysts from across the modes was charged with drafting the policy, and six multidisciplinary cluster teams were given the responsibility of conducting outreach within transport markets (intercity freight; intercity passenger; international; rural; urban; and innovation/human factors). The use of this ad hoc, offline, multimodal approach allowed freer thinking and modal integration. The team could readily develop proposals and resolve differences without going through long and

cumbersome bureaucratic decision-making procedures.

To ensure broad "ownership" for the policy throughout the department, staff and appointed officials from each of the modes were included. The outreach and policy development processes were largely in the hands of people and organizations who ultimately would have to implement the policy.

The kickoff event for the outreach was "Moving America: A Look Ahead to the 21st Century," a conference arranged by TRB at the National Academy of Sciences in July 1989. Here, provocative papers on



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the factors influencing transportation and the future of the transportation industry were presented (5). From July through September, more than 100 outreach events were held across the country, including 34 public hearings and a series of special technical seminars on such topics as energy, the environment, national defense, and transportation/economic growth.

Early policy positions were a product of the information gained in outreach, a review of the extant literature, and in-house knowledge. Meetings held with Secretary Skinner and senior DOT officials and follow-up sessions were keys to the policy development process and are continuing.

The timing of the policy release, on March 8, 1990, was arranged to build on the Secretary's address at the TRB Chairman's Luncheon in January 1990, the TransExpo exhibition held simultaneously with the TRB annual meeting, announcement of the President's budget, and the State of the Union message. The Cabinet was fully briefed on the policy in mid-February to ensure administration-wide support. Presidential involvement in the announcement of the policy was given top priority to elevate the position of transportation on the national agenda.

## Policy Statement

The Statement of National Transportation Policy is a framework for decision making. It is not a plan. It was never intended to be a budget statement incorporating proposed funding levels. It is not an industrial policy dictating the steps industry must follow. Instead, it provides guidance and an overall structure for both short- and long-term action grounded in sound transportation economics and free market principles.

The policy is built around six broad themes capturing the salient issues, concerns, and strategies of each of the transportation markets and modes. The themes focus on transportation infrastructure, finance, transportation providers, safety and security, the

environment, and transportation technology and expertise. It asserts that this country must make major advances in each of these areas.

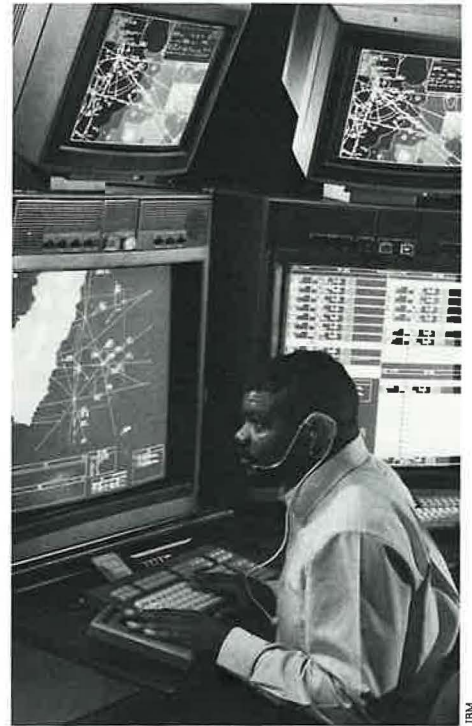
Under this policy, DOT will place emphasis on moving people and goods—not vehicles. The emphasis is on the need to invest more resources more wisely, to restructure the federal, state, local, and private sector partnerships, and to manage systems more effectively. The policy recommends increased flexibility for grant-in-aid programs and new financial mechanisms such as local airport passenger facility charges and greater use of toll financing on highways.

Unproductive regulations and laws that impede transportation providers must be removed, according to the policy statement. For example, federal preemption should be considered in the interest of interstate commerce in cases in which nonuniform treatment of carriers across the states imposes billions of dollars of waste on the economy.

The nation's transportation safety must be improved. The policy statement emphasizes that safety will not be deregulated. The loss of almost 50,000 lives per year in transportation accidents can no longer be tolerated. Similarly, transportation's environmental costs must be reduced and the security of transportation systems enhanced.

Finally, if this nation is to compete effectively in the coming century, research and development of new technology and education of work forces for the future must be advanced. The policy document calls for an increased federal budget for research and technology development and work with universities and research institutions.

The policy document differs from previous efforts in several respects. It was based on concerns raised by the public, the industry, and transportation officials outside as well as inside the department. It is extremely broad in its coverage of issues and activities across all the modes. It is not just a philosophic discussion but also has strategies for implementation, with time allowed for several years of follow-up action.



*"This industry [transportation] is a focal point for technology innovations.*

*Magnetically levitated trains, intelligent vehicles and highways, advanced materials and engineering, and telecommunications all have enormous potential to improve the movement of Americans and their products."*

—Samuel Skinner, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation

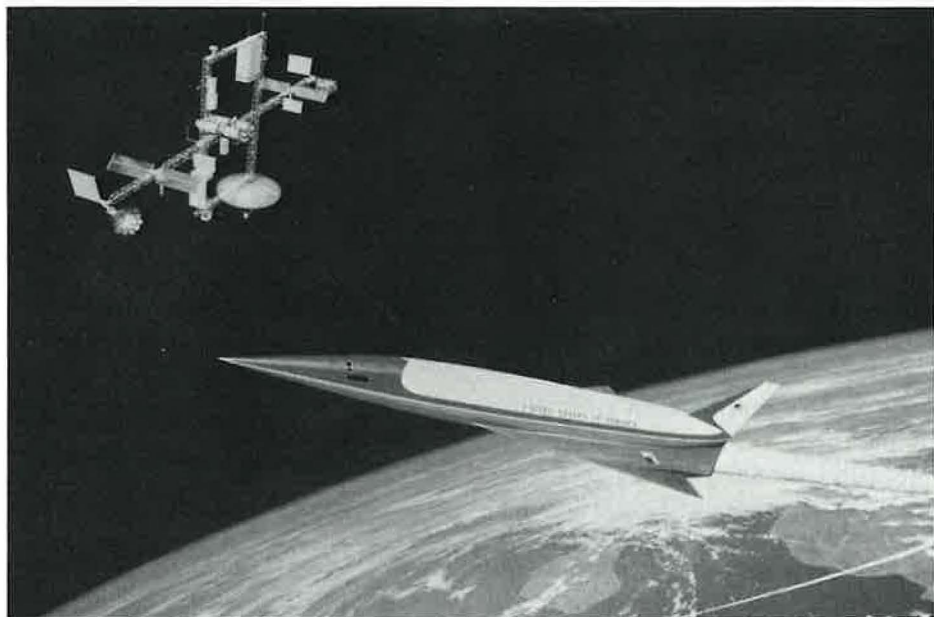


## Policy Implementation

Aggressive marketing of this new policy is under way. Making use of the media, through the use of videotapes, brochures, speakers' bureaus, and editorial briefings, the discussion has been kept in the forefront. DOT staff are participating in forums across the country to discuss approaches to solving transportation concerns. With legislative debates on the future of the aviation, highway, and tran-

research functions advocated, the budget and DOT's intermodal coordination of these activities are being closely monitored.

Effective policy development is clearly not a one-shot process. Implementation must include establishment of a continuing comprehensive policy development and review process. DOT's policy must be living, changing, and keeping pace with the realities of this multifaceted society.



sit programs on the national agenda, transportation issues must continue to receive national emphasis.

Each of the major units of the department has developed policy implementation plans. Specific action areas also include the submission of far-reaching aviation reauthorization legislation (a greater than 70 percent increase in funding for aviation-related infrastructure over the next five years) and the launching of a major new intelligent vehicle-highway systems initiative with the private sector in Orlando, Florida.

In addition to advancing the legislative, program, and regulatory changes, a series of organizational and management issues is being closely reviewed as a part of a Phase 2 policy effort. For example, to carry out the future policy analysis and

## Conclusion

Implementation of the Statement of National Transportation Policy will make a difference. DOT has given this project top priority and believes that continued and substantive follow-up action will enable transportation to earn the national attention it merits. Final judgment on the results will, however, depend on how well the public perceives transportation improvement.

What can other large government units learn from this exercise? To mobilize the resources of a large agency, the following guidelines are offered. An effective program must have

- Executive commitment, starting at the top of the organization,
- Highest priority,

- Cooperation among political appointees and career staff in working for the common goal,

- A comprehensive outreach and learning phase to gain credibility on the issues, and

- Involvement of all elements of the organization. If "corporate culture" is to change, the process must involve the whole team.

## References

1. *Moving America: New Directions, New Opportunities. A Statement of National Transportation Policy (Strategies for Action)*. U.S. Department of Transportation, Feb. 1990.
2. John Bryson. *Strategic Planning for Public and Non-Profit Organizations*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1988.
3. *Moving America: Building the National Transportation Policy*. U.S. Department of Transportation, July 1989.
4. *National Transportation Strategic Planning Study*. U.S. Department of Transportation, March 1990.
5. *Moving America: A Look Ahead to the 21st Century*. Proceedings of a Conference Arranged by the Transportation Research Board, National Research Council, Washington, D.C., July 24, 1989. U.S. Department of Transportation, Oct. 1989.

### Focus of National Transportation Policy

Federal transportation policy for the future builds on six key themes:

- Maintain and expand the nation's transportation system,
- Foster a sound financial base for transportation,
- Keep the transportation industry strong and competitive,
- Ensure that the transportation system supports public safety and national security,
- Protect the environment and the quality of life, and
- Advance U.S. transportation technology and expertise.

# 1991 TRB Annual Meeting

The Chairman and Executive Committee of the Transportation Research Board extend to you a cordial invitation to participate in the Board's **70th Annual Meeting**, to be held January 13-17, 1991, in Washington, D.C. This meeting is considered to be the largest and most comprehensive gathering of transportation researchers and practitioners in the world and provides an excellent forum for those who wish to maintain a high level of professional competence in this complex field. Technical papers on a wide variety of subjects will be presented and discussed by transportation professionals.

As usual, the meeting will be held at the Sheraton Washington and Omni Shoreham hotels, but **this year a third hotel, the Washington Hilton, has been added** to accommodate the growing number of participants, an increase of 1,000 during the past five years. The added session rooms will alleviate the overcrowding experienced in the past, and larger committee meeting rooms will also be available.

Most of the Group 1—Transportation Systems Planning and Administration activities will move from the Shoreham to the Hilton. The aviation and rail activities of Group 1 will remain at

the Shoreham. Some sessions and meetings previously held at the Sheraton will be moved to the Shoreham.

The Hilton is located at 1919 Connecticut Avenue (at Columbia Road), approximately four blocks south of the Sheraton. Shuttle service between the Hilton and the Sheraton and Shoreham hotels will be provided. Registration services will be available at all three hotels, and visual aid review will be offered at the Sheraton and the Hilton.

The addition of the third hotel is planned as a one-year experiment to help meet long-term needs. Further information will appear in future issues of *TR News* and in meeting announcements. Please keep this change in mind when making your hotel reservations and note that the room rates will be the same at all three hotels. To better accommodate the growing number of attendees, **advance registration** is available through December 10, 1990.

If you have any questions, please contact Angelia V. Arrington, TRB Conference Manager, at 202-334-2934 or Reggie Gillum at 202-334-2382.

**ADVANCE REGISTRATION FORM:** (Deadline for reduced fee **December 10, 1990.**) Please print or type one form for each participant (copy if necessary). Mail form with payment to Conference Registrar, Transportation Research Board, 2101 Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20418. A confirmation will be sent. **Preregistration applications received without payment will be returned. Any forms received after December 10, 1990, will not be processed in time for the meeting.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Last First Middle Initial (Nickname for Badge)  
 Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Please abbreviate if necessary  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
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Will pick up registration packet at  
☐ Sheraton Washington  
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OPTIONAL INFORMATION (please check)  
 First time attending Annual Meeting? Yes ☐ No ☐  
 Male ☐ Female ☐ Minority Yes ☐ No ☐

ORGANIZATION TYPE (Please check one only)

U.S. REGISTRANTS ONLY

- ☐ 1. U.S. DOT  
☐ 2. Other Federal Agency  
☐ 3. State Highway/Transportation Dept.  
☐ 4. Other State Government  
☐ 5. Local Government  
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☐ 7. Consultant

- ☐ 8. Industry  
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- ☐ A. General fee  
☐ B. TRB Individual Affiliate  
☐ C. Member of TRB council, committee, task force, special project or NCHRP/NCTRP panel; program participant; or other receiving special notice  
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Preregistration Fee	On-Site Registration Fee
\$145.00	\$180.00
\$105.00	145.00
80.00	105.00
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15.00	15.00

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N/C

N/C

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Chairman's Luncheon tickets # ( ) × \$28.00 = \_\_\_\_\_

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