

**STPP's
Partner State
Program**

TRANSPORTATION PARTNERSHIPS

HANK DITTMAR AND CHRISTOPHER BENDER

As late as 1987 few individuals in the transportation industry could have foreseen the landmark changes that would result from the next reauthorization of the federal surface transportation legislation. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 has profoundly changed working relationships in transportation policy.

In 1990 a network of diverse organizations, coalitions, and grass roots groups came together to form the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP). The STPP participating organizations were all transportation stakeholders that had traditionally been absent from transportation policy discussions and investment decisions. Many of the groups are now referred to as the new partners: planners, design professionals, environmentalists, neighborhood advocates, urban interests, alternative transportation advocates, preservationists, and conservationists.

The goal of STPP was to develop a model transportation policy that would ensure that policy and investments help conserve energy, protect environmental and aesthetic quality, strengthen the economy, promote social equity, and make communities more livable. Furthermore, the new transportation policy was to emphasize the movement of people and goods instead of vehicles.

Many of the STPP fundamental policy recommendations, such as more comprehensive planning, flexibility of funding cat-

egories, a level playing field for the various modes, and increased public involvement in the planning process, became cornerstones of ISTEA. ISTEA's passage lent to STPP a sense of responsibility for implementing this regeneration of national transportation policy.

Today STPP is a nonprofit coalition of more than 100 groups whose aim is to reform transportation policy to be socially equitable, economically effective, energy conserving, and environmentally sensitive. Its steering committee includes such organizations as the American Institute of Architects, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the American Planning Association, the American Public Transit Association, and the Environmental Defense Fund.

The partnerships and cooperation of the STPP member organizations at the national level served as a model for STPP work at the state and local levels. The coalition was committed to seeing through the implementation of ISTEA by assisting state and local areas in their implementation efforts and monitoring their progress.

Soon after ISTEA was enacted in late 1991, STPP increased efforts to monitor and assist state and local implementation of the federal law. In 1992 representatives traveled to 14 states to survey state department of transportation employees, metropolitan planning organization representatives, elected officials, public advocates, business leaders, transit operators, and other stakeholders. The purpose of the survey was to determine what states and localities needed to make ISTEA work. The survey revealed that education

was needed across the board, not only on ISTEA but also on the concepts of land use, growth management, air quality, and public participation.

To meet these information needs, STPP launched two major programs: the Partner State Program and the Transportation Planning for Livable Communities conference series. The latter initiative was a series of 11 regional conferences that brought representatives from all of the traditional fields of transportation together with some of the new partners in transportation planning outlined in ISTEA. The conferences served the dual purposes of bringing these people together and educating them about the new provisions of ISTEA.

The Partner State Program sought to focus STPP resources and technical assistance on ISTEA implementation in several key states. STPP would assist in implementing the new transportation law and in doing so develop case examples of how states, MPOs, and public organizations were meeting the challenges of ISTEA. STPP planned to work with the same parties it had interviewed during the survey process: the public, local officials, planners, and state officials.

The STPP Steering Committee chose eight states to be approached as potential partner states. States were selected on the basis of a range of considerations, including congressional representation, the reputation of the state transportation department and the likelihood that other states would seek it out as a model, the mix of urban and rural areas within the state, and the likelihood that STPP presence would be welcomed or supported by citizen

Hank Dittmar is Executive Director and Christopher Bender is State Coordinator, Surface Transportation Policy Project.

groups, MPOs, and state officials. Six states ultimately participated: Georgia, Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington.

Phase 1: Establishing Relationships

The program targeted three groups: SDOTs, MPOs, and citizen advocacy groups. It involved three phases: the introduction of STPP to the targeted groups and formulation of an action plan for individual work with each group for the duration of the program, the implementation of the action plans, and establishment of sustaining relationships among the targeted groups and reduction of STPP involvement.

To formalize the program and fulfill the first part of Phase 1, a memorandum of understanding with the SDOT was developed. The MOU established STPP availability to provide technical and practical resources on the reforms in ISTEA. In return, the state would open its planning process to STPP. It was also made clear that STPP would work with MPOs and public advocacy groups, providing similar resources and ensuring the exchange of information among the three parties. The program would last 18 months, from January 1, 1993, to June 30, 1994.

During 1993 project organizers met with state officials regularly, conducted joint training for state and local officials, connected emerging citizen coalitions with the state officials responsible for public participation in ISTEA planning, and publicized the results of several processes that were developed through these efforts.

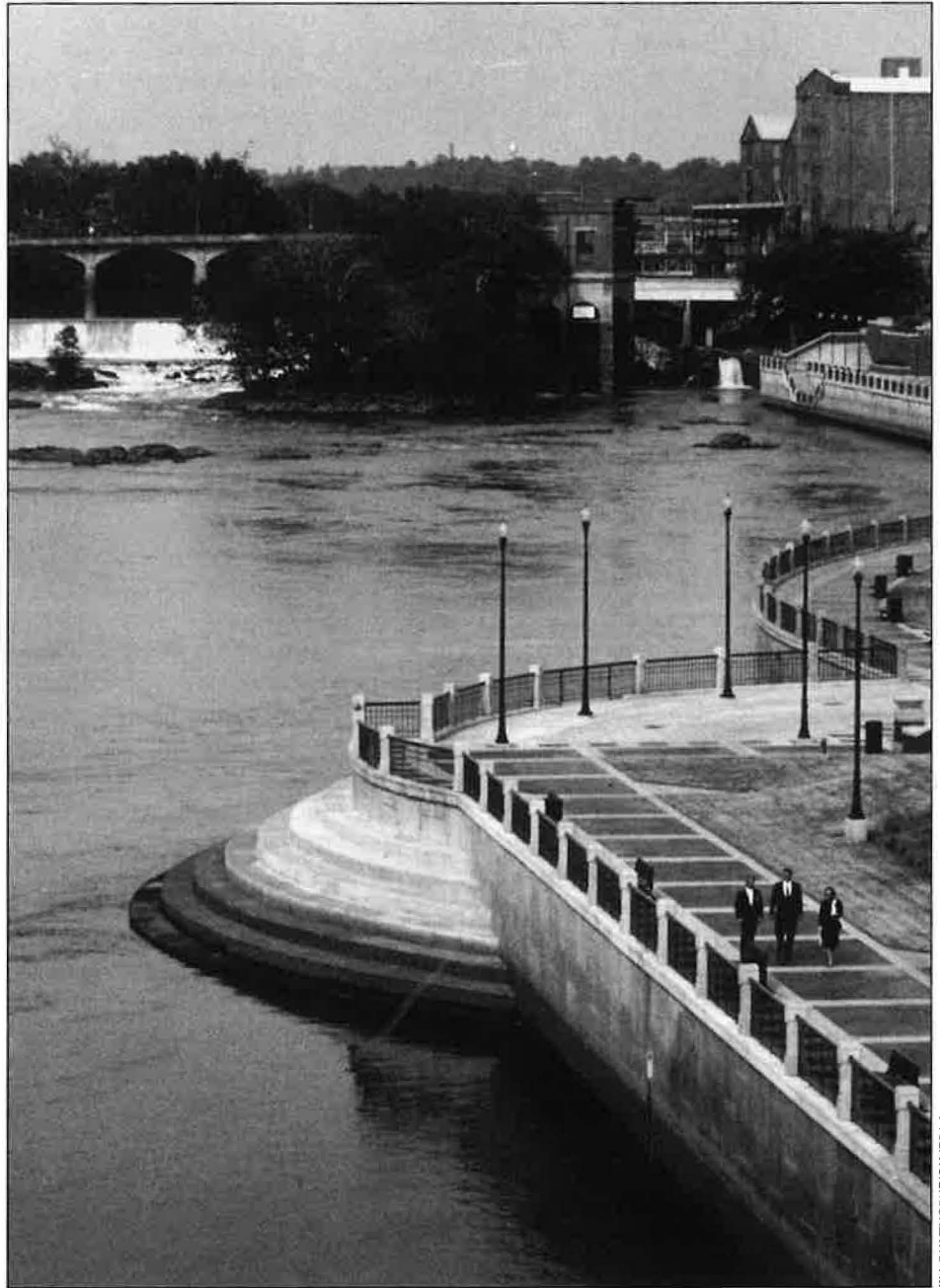
Phase 2: Implementing State and Regional Action Plans

On the SDOT level, STPP was involved with the development of management systems, long-range planning, and public participation. At the regional level, work was carried out with large and small MPOs. The largest MPOs, which ISTEA designates as Transportation Management Areas, have special responsibilities for air

quality planning and receive a direct sub-allocation of funds under the surface transportation program of ISTEA. On this level, STPP worked on broadening public participation and ensuring compliance with the Clean Air Act. Workshops were conducted for smaller MPOs to deal with such issues as integrating community development and transportation, recog-

nizing and taking on new responsibilities under the new ISTEA planning requirements, and forging partnerships with citizens and other agencies.

The Partner State Program, combined with the Transportation Planning for Livable Communities conferences, helped bring together groups and individuals into statewide coalitions to work on the



Columbus is site of one of Georgia's ISTEA Transportation Enhancement projects. Columbus Riverwalk has been used as workshop case study on how partnerships can help make proposals a reality.

State	Key Focus Areas	STPP Role
Georgia	Public involvement	Facilitator and resource
	MPO and state partnerships	Facilitator and organizer
	Broad-based transportation coalitions	Facilitator and resource
Minnesota	Public involvement	Resource and reviewer
	Enhancements	Resource and reviewer
Missouri	Long-range planning	Resource and reviewer
	Management systems	Resource and presenter
	Public involvement	Facilitator and resource
	Broad-based citizen coalitions	Facilitator and organizer
	Transit issues	Resource and presenter
Pennsylvania	Long-range planning	Resource and developer
	Rural planning	Resource and presenter
	Public involvement	Resource and presenter
Texas	Congestion Management and Air Quality Funding Program	Resource and developer
	Broad-based transportation coalitions	Facilitator and resource
	Enhancements	Resource and reviewer
Washington	Public involvement	Resource and reviewer
	Intermodal planning	Facilitator and resource

STPP Role in Partner State Program.

transportation planning process. The state coalitions represent public activist and advocacy groups, the business community, neighborhood organizations, and various government agencies, such as state historic preservation offices, natural resource divisions, and energy and air offices. The coalitions bring to the transportation planning process important perspectives on the considerations transportation must now address. They are also important forums in which to integrate interests and approaches required by the final phase of the program.

Phase 3: Program Integration

The Partner State Program is not only a partnership among STPP and local groups, but it also develops sustaining partnerships within states. To create lasting reform to meet the

requirements of ISTEA, the three groups with which STPP works must connect and work cooperatively. The statewide coalitions are the primary tool for this integration.

Some SDOTs are active members of coalitions in their states. The next step was to bring the MPOs into the fold. Once this was achieved and all groups were participating and communicating, the coalition was elevated to a partnership whose members work to educate themselves and others in the community. The goal of such partnerships is to build trust among individuals with different points of view, reinforce their common interests, and foster comprehensive planning and policy development at all levels of government. STPP is seeking ways to involve new points of view in these partnerships to facilitate more visionary, equitable transportation planning and garner wide support for the decisions that result.

With the completion of the Partner State Program, STPP plans to work more flexibly with states and regions that have critical needs for technical assistance, training, and materials. By the end of 1994, STPP will release a full report on the program, which will document it and provide a guide to implementing similar programs in other states. This information will enable other states to avoid the mistakes made by the partner states and to replicate the successes.

Reflections on the Program

The Partner State Program officially ended on June 30, 1994. A number of activities initiated under the program were still under way and were completed in fall 1994. The program assessed how ISTEA affected transportation in its first three years. This initial period of ISTEA is marked by great change, but not the kind of change visible to commuters. However the change, which is internal, is becoming increasingly evident to the general populace. The key element in making this change possible and productive is partnership. Comprehensive planning and integration of expertise are taking the transportation industry to new levels of intricacy within our everyday lives.

Starting with the foundation of the transportation planning process—the statewide and metropolitan long-range plans—partnerships have probably been the only common denominator in the process among the states and regions. Long-range planning is a newer concept to some agencies than others; however, ISTEA has made long-range planning a mandate, and one that must include certain basic elements. The plan must provide a vision for the transportation system for the next 20 years. To form that vision requires the input of many elements of the community. Almost all states and metropolitan areas have started reaching out to the public and other agencies to help define the transportation vision. They may not know exactly what the finished product may prescribe, but they know that it will reflect the direction set forth by the people whom the system will serve. For many public interest

organizations that had been involved in transportation before enactment of ISTEA, participation in the process revolved around support of or opposition to specific projects. These groups were then becoming partners in a process that set a vision—one that, if implemented, would negate the need to oppose projects.

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is the implementing tool of the long-range plan. It lists the specific projects that will help the transportation system fulfill the vision. The partnerships that were formed in developing the long-range plan are now in place for the TIP. All parties should understand the process and why things must or should be done. There are relationships and communications between groups that will help the groups work together instead of against one another.

When elements of the planning process (such as management systems or planning factors) were developed, the most productive results came from agencies that brought in all parties from the beginning. The approach was simple once all parties were together: everybody needs to know and understand each other, expectations of all sides need to be clear and understood by all, and responsibilities must be identified and agreed on.

This simple partnership process was used at workshops that brought together MPOs with their SDOTs, public organizations with MPOs, transit operators with public organizations, and so on. The elements of the partnership were simple, but the actual working together proved to be more involved. It presented the challenge of working with those you may not agree with, trust, or even like, to make something come together.

The opening of the transportation process to all of the new partners has begun but still has a distance to go. The Partner State Program demonstrated that we all have something to offer.

State Expenditures Under ISTEA

Another way in which STPP is monitoring and encouraging the implementation

of ISTEA is by compiling a state expenditure report that categorizes each state's obligations of highway funds. The report covers fiscal years 1991 to 1993. Fiscal year 1991 precedes ISTEA and is used as a comparison for the two years under ISTEA. Analysis of fiscal years 1992 and 1993 suggests that familiar programs are being favored by most states. States are spending the National Highway System and Interstate Maintenance program funds most quickly and spending funds in the new flexible categories (Enhancements, Surface Transportation Program, and Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality) much more slowly.

Many states still face several obstacles to fully implementing ISTEA. First, states have had to carry out their decision making without key regulations from the federal government. The planning regulations for ISTEA were issued by the U.S. Department of Transportation in October 1993, and the regulations governing the conformity of transportation plans to State Implementation Plans for air quality improvement were issued in November.

In addition, transportation laws and practices in many states do not support the changes under ISTEA. Many traditional highway projects were in the pipeline when ISTEA was passed and are well into their engineering stages. Newer kinds of projects are less well developed, and their sponsors are unfamiliar with the complex rules and regulations governing transportation spending. Statutory requirements governing prompt expenditure, state gas tax funds limited to highway construction, and political pressures have reinforced many states' decisions to carry out "pipeline" projects.

Conclusions

In two years of work with state and local entities on the implementation of ISTEA, STPP has reached several conclusions about the Partner State Program: many SDOTs are open to working toward common goals with coalitions such as STPP. The partnerships formed between STPP and states were most effective in conjunction with local alliances. National organi-

zations cannot impose their agendas on states; instead, they must assist local organizations with whom they share goals.

Working on national issues requires a broad perspective, whereas work at the state and local levels requires attention to specifics. Future efforts of STPP at the state and local levels will focus on efforts with definitive beginnings, middles, and end products. The Partner State Program, which accomplished its goals, was broad. Future efforts will be more narrowly defined.

Partnerships are the hallmark of ISTEA. Just as SDOTs had to forge partnerships with contractors and engineers at the start of the Interstate system, today they must form partnerships with local governments, MPOs, professional associations, private interests, and citizens. The experience of three years indicates that the clearest winners under ISTEA have been those willing to make new alliances and participate in transportation planning to create a sustainable transportation network.