

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION IN AN AGE OF SUBSTATE REGIONALISM

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The substate regional level—that level below the states but above the cities and frequently the counties—is discussed as it relates to implementation of metropolitan transportation planning. The status of substate regional development is discussed, and the advantages of this reorganization are given. ACIR developed an umbrella multijurisdictional organization strategy, which is recommended as one means of reorganizing jurisdictions at the substate level. The role of the metropolitan transportation planner is related to the development of these substate regions.

•THE Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 mandated metropolitan transportation planning for all urbanized areas as a prerequisite to continued federal funding of highway construction. The Urban Mass Transportation Act also requires such planning. These requirements have spawned a tremendous amount of planning in metropolitan areas. All such areas, except a few SMSAs established since 1970, now have comprehensive transportation planning programs. Moreover, detailed planning techniques have been developed since 1962 to support this type of planning. As a matter of fact, transportation planning is probably the most highly developed type of metropolitan planning in existence.

Nevertheless, the literature in the field reveals that planners are doubtful about the adequacy of their efforts and that most of this planning has not been implemented.

In 1973, ACIR completed a 2-year study of substate regionalism in which 24 federal programs with an areawide thrust and over 600 regional councils that are beginning to coordinate many diverse substate regional activities were analyzed. ACIR has also studied the continuing growth of special districts and public authorities as well as recent annexation and consolidation efforts, some of which have succeeded in establishing metropolitan governments.

Of course, federally aided transportation programs encourage establishment of substate bodies for planning and implementation purposes. But this study, while encompassing transportation, is concerned with the gamut of recent districting and re-organizational activities at the substate level. Its findings and recommendations merit some attention.

SUBSTATE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Substate regionalism has become a top-priority item on the federal agenda. For more than 2 years, ACIR has probed the wide range of recent substate regional developments that have combined to make it the challenge it is.

More institutions, more programs, more coordinating efforts, more comprehensive and functional planning, and even more servicing at the substate level exist now than did a decade ago. There is clear evidence of major federal involvement, lesser state concern, and basic local governmental anxiety. Above all, more confusion and conflict exist at this level than ever existed before. And no wonder!

The rapid pace of recent regional council and districting developments has transformed the jurisdictions of practically all metropolitan areas and most nonmetropolitan regions. This transformation has been due largely to federal 701 funds, the Metropolitan Development Act of 1966, and the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1968. About 450 clearinghouses have been designated pursuant to these acts, and most of them have a council-of-government format. About 1,800 federally encouraged districts

have been established at the substate level under 19 separate categorical and block grant programs (transportation, comprehensive health planning, law enforcement, air pollution). Independent special districts and authorities, many in the transportation field, numbered about 25,000 in 1972, making them the fastest growing unit of local governments, but only about one-quarter of these had boundaries that matched those of cities or counties. Finally, and partially in response to some of the federally encouraged districting efforts, 44 states (as of 1973) have officially sponsored substate districting systems; and Nevada has taken tentative steps in that direction. In contrast, a decade ago there were only about 25 councils of government, a handful of areawide transportation units, three or four states with substate districting systems, and 5,564 fewer special districts and authorities.

Indications

What are some of the indications of these substate developments? Functionally, these developments—particularly the special and federally encouraged districts—signify the emergence of various servicing problems and programs that transcend local government boundaries. They show that the federal government has been the prime sponsor of district planning and coordinating mechanisms while most states have assumed a more passive posture. But all government levels, particularly the states, have encouraged the growth of special districts and authorities, most of them independent, with operating responsibilities.

Bureaucratically, many of these districting mechanisms can be viewed as efforts on the part of middle management and program specialists to establish functional planning, coordinating, and fund disbursing counterparts at the substate level.

Jurisdictionally, they reflect the growing impatience of federal and state policymakers with the areal inadequacies and fragmentation of local governments in nearly all metropolitan areas and all nonmetropolitan regions.

In terms of power, they suggest that the functionalists are winning out against politically accountable, elected officials of general-purpose governments because of the weakness of most councils of government, the continuing strength of special districts, the separate status of a majority of federally encouraged districts, and the embryonic character of most substate districting systems established by the states.

Finally, in basic policy terms, these districting developments demonstrate that the traditional federal, state, and local levels have adhered to an ambivalent substate regional course; they have sought to strengthen general multipurpose mechanisms on the one hand, and encourage separate, single-purpose units on the other.

A Substate Districting Reform Strategy

What has been missing in all but a handful of cases is a regional unit with the capacity to link areawide planning with program implementation, to coordinate the diverse activities of separate districts having single-function planning and operation responsibilities—in short, to serve as an effective regional decision-maker. Hence, ACIR adopted an umbrella multijurisdictional organization (UMJO) strategy.

As a consequence of a series of federal, local, and state actions, the UMJO would

1. Adopt and publicize regional policies and plans, along with a program for their implementation;
2. Provide planning and programming inputs into the state's planning and budgeting process;
3. Serve as the region's A-95 review agency;
4. Implement all federally encouraged areawide planning, programming, coordinating, districting, and servicing programs as well as similar state undertakings;
5. Act as the basic policy board for multijurisdictional special districts;
6. Promote mutual problem-solving among counties, cities, and towns and provide services these units may singly or jointly request;
7. Resolve differences between state agency and local government programs and projects that conflict with policies adopted by the council; and

8. In certain instances, assume direct operating responsibilities under such terms as may be set down in the state authorizing legislation, provided half the local member units representing 60 percent of the region's population concur.

This reform regional council then would be a comprehensive and functional planning, coordinating, programming, servicing, and implementing body. (A draft of a state districting bill incorporating these features is now available to all who wish to explore this ACIR proposal in greater detail.)

That this strategy for districting reform is anchored to the real world of substate development is proved by the following:

1. Regional councils with A-95 review and comment authority already exist in 212 metropolitan and 238 nonmetropolitan areas.

2. Two-thirds of the more than 500 substate districts established in 44 states now are organized, and action is under way in a 45th state.

3. The boundaries of the most significant federally encouraged districting programs coincide (or are in harmony) with those of the state-established substate districts in about 50 percent of the cases, and federal agencies have relied on substate districting organizations in more than one-third of the possible cases in those eight program areas.

4. Approximately half of the regional councils already are the administering regional unit for the federally encouraged areawide districting programs operating in their regions.

5. Seven states have reviewed and approved some or all of their regional councils over certain state projects.

6. Four-fifths of the 3,800 city and county officials surveyed by ACIR agreed that regional councils should perform the duties of an umbrella agency, especially with regard to the activities of independent special districts.

7. The Metropolitan Regional Council in Minnesota's Twin Cities area, the Atlanta Regional Council, and as many as 10 percent of the other councils already possess many or most of the proposed powers and functions assigned to the reformed regional councils under ACIR's recommendations.

The UMJO strategy relies heavily on the building blocks at the substate level but goes beyond the status quo in a systematic effort to provide an effective umbrella unit that can cope with the growing demands for better management, coordination, implementation, and decision-making in areawide programs and institutions.

The Other Side of the Coin

But what of modernizing local government? Federally supported districts, state-established substate districts, the growing number of special districts and authorities, regional councils, and areawide coordinating procedures are, after all, merely one huge chaotic commentary on the fact that the present jurisdictional pattern at the multi-county, county, and municipal levels is, in all but a few cases, markedly dysfunctional and in many respects undemocratic.

No analysis of the complexities and challenge of recent substate developments would be complete then without consideration of the local and areawide government reorganization issue. The strengthened regional council strategy should not be viewed as hostile to, or incompatible with, local and areawide government reorganization. Both are necessary components of an overall effort that must be mounted to bring the structure and functions of units below the state level to a point where they can cope with the electorate's current and future servicing demands in a more efficient and accountable fashion.

For some, the UMJO strategy is primarily a reaction to the recent rash of substate regional developments and should be interpreted as a short-range response to an immediate problem. For others, the UMJO proposal stands as a major reform objective by itself, given that in several areas such a unit is the only regional innovation possible. It is seen, then, as the only feasible long-range solution to a number of present and prospective areawide problems. Still others see the UMJO as a transitional mechanism that may serve as a prelude to more fundamental government reorganization. Finally, there are those who stress that, in most of the complex, multicounty regions, restruc-

turing government units below the substate level will always be a top-priority issue, regardless of what the upper tier unit is. They feel that subareawide government reorganization is as much a part of the substate regional dilemma as the areawide governance question because they believe that consolidation is an unlikely reorganization option in most areas and any regional unit, to be effective, will need strong and viable constituent general governments.

Each of these perspectives has merit. The differences among them are largely a product of varying views on timing, the feasibility of various reform options in divergent regions, and the kinds of jurisdictional and servicing problems confronting the areas.

From a national viewpoint, then, districting reform and local government reorganization are policies that must be treated together. What the specific interrelationships are is basically up to each state, its localities, and citizenry.

The Reorganization Record

What has been the nation's recent experience with local government reorganization and modernization? In general, the record has been impressive, but less significant than the reformer would want. For example, nearly 75 percent of all metropolitan county expenditures are still earmarked for traditional (state-mandated) county functions such as corrections, roads, health, hospitals, and natural resource development, but libraries, parks, recreation, and fire protection are emerging as more common urban types of services in these jurisdictions.

Four-fifths of all counties still possess a commission type of government, though manager or elected executive have enjoyed a rapid growth in urban counties in the past 10 years.

Nearly two-thirds of all urban municipalities annexed territory during the 1960s, and more than 6 million people were affected by such actions, but the bulk of these annexations were small and in only a few instances was a means of achieving a de facto metropolitan government provided.

More city-county consolidations (11) took place between 1962 and 1972 than during the previous century and a half, but, of every four attempts, on the average only one succeeded and the bulk of these in the southeast.

Rarely has the multitier approach to local and areawide government reorganization been tried in the United States. Miami-Dade County is the only example of a deliberate chartering of a federated urban county. A few states permit incorporation of metropolitan multipurpose servicing districts and a few are functioning at present. The state-supported regional council, best represented by the Twin Cities Metropolitan Regional Council, is the past decade's contribution to the multitier approach. This general-purpose policy-making unit has responsibility for developing areawide plans, coordinating the major functional agencies operating in the region, and guiding the area's development.

Most local governments are found within 95 percent of the nation's land, which is classed as nonmetropolitan. This includes 70 percent of the municipalities, 85 percent of the counties, 80 percent of the townships, and 67 percent of the special districts and authorities, but only 30 percent of our population resides in nonmetropolitan areas. These units, unlike their metropolitan counterparts, provide fewer services, exhibit less administrative capacity, suffer from more diseconomies of scale, have weaker financial bases, and are subject to fewer reorganization efforts.

Finally, six states have established broad-ranged boundary control boards or commissions on a statewide or county basis, and a number of these are contributing to orderly expansion of municipal boundaries and a slower growth rate for new special districts and municipal incorporations.

New Moves Toward Local Government Modernization

In light of these findings, ACIR is developing a series of proposals that we hope will combine to form an action agenda for local government modernization that complements its strategy for substate districting reform. The tentative agenda encompasses six broad and interrelated objectives.

1. It seeks to place the sanction of state statutory authority behind a set of enforceable standards relating to municipal incorporation, local government viability, and annexation.
2. The states are urged to establish boundary commissions, where lacking, to apply these standards in specific instances and to assume a continuing responsibility in matters such as the dissolution or merger of special districts and of nonviable general governmental units and adjustments of county and substate district boundaries.
3. It provides reform proposals geared to revitalizing the structure of county governments, to sorting out and reconciling county and municipal servicing responsibilities, and to carving out a new state role that is supportive of these efforts.
4. The states are encouraged to enact permissive legislation providing five regional home-rule options for consideration by the general governments and the electorates within the substate districts. The distinctive features of each of these options are designed to meet the special problems of different types of substate regions. The options include multicounty consolidation, city-county merger, the modernized county, the multipurpose regional service corporation, and conversion of an UMJO into a regular government unit.
5. The proposed agenda calls for the formation of broadly representative, permanent state advisory commissions on intergovernmental relations to probe the structure, functions, finances, and relationships of lower tier, middle-tier, and state governments.
6. The agenda includes a federal policy on the local government modernization question that complements rather than cancels well-conceived state and local efforts on this front.

THE MEANING FOR METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION

How do these approaches relate specifically to the needs of the broadly defined metropolitan transportation community? In metropolitan transportation planning literature, the interrelation between transportation and almost everything else is apparent. Land use generates transportation demands, and transportation facilities generate land use demands. Transportation is essential to our economy, but transportation produces a major share of air pollution and other adverse environmental impacts. Transportation provides access for individuals to better opportunities for jobs, cultural activities, medical care, and many other services, but transportation facilities displace many people and reduce the quality of life for many others. So we cannot look at transportation alone.

This reinforces the proposition that pulling together all regional activities in a single areawide organization at the regional level is the right way to go. This, of course, is not without its problems. Much of the transportation activity at the present time is in the hands of state government. The state then must be accommodated. ACIR believes that a regional level organization, controlled to a large extent by local elected officials, is the most appropriate because (a) local residents are most directly affected by transportation improvements and (b) the regional level is the lowest level at which metropolitan travel patterns can be perceived and planned. There is provision in the ACIR recommendations on substate districting for direct participation by the state in the regional organization. There are also ample opportunities through the grant-in-aid process for state interests to be felt in both the planning and implementation of transportation projects. The great need in most areas is to get federal, state, and local levels of government working together through metropolitanwide substate districts that have some degree of decision-making authority and planning responsibilities. Where effective regional government exists, it should be the focus of these efforts.

Many transportation planners are already deeply involved in, and part of, the regional council and substate districting movement. But others, who are employees of state, city, or county government rather than a regional agency, are not. This inevitably affects the way in which they see the metropolitan transportation problem and the ways in which they react to it. A greater awareness of the metropolitan view of transportation is needed by all urban highway, public transit, airport, and water transportation program planners. This awareness should not be just at the technical level, but include the political, social, economic, and environmental realities of these areas.

Metropolitan transportation planners then should become involved, along with politicians, social scientists, engineers, implementation officials, and others, in developing adequate, representative metropolitan organizations that can plan and influence transportation implementation activities. In most cases, this will involve helping to delineate appropriate boundaries for the region and to develop effective metropolitan councils or UMJOs.

Metropolitan transportation planners should help to develop new programming techniques to translate general plans and policies into specific actions scheduled and funded on a coordinated multiyear, multifunctional basis. This is a tall order, but some progress has already been made. One of the biggest complaints against existing metropolitan planning is that it has not been translated into immediate-action proposals. Sometimes this has even been its purpose, so that controversial immediate-action proposals would not interfere with the adoption of long-range goals and plans. As well based as that fear might be, long-range planning that provides no means of getting from here to there cannot be expected to have an impact on implementation agencies. Too frequently, the long-range plan is one thing and the action program of an implementing agency is another. It is the metropolitan transportation planner's responsibility to propose a bridge between the two that sufficiently takes into account the political, economic, environmental, and other realities of an area. Without this, no policy of an authoritative and politically accountable metropolitan decision-making body will be effective.

Metropolitan transportation planners seeking to have a real impact on implementation activities must also take their responsibility for monitoring implementation projects seriously. A more significant review process is needed than is currently practiced in most areas under OMB Circular A-95. ACIR recommends that the A-95 process be given the additional clout that would enable the metropolitan clearinghouse to resolve any conflicts between metropolitan policy and proposed implementation projects. Such resolution would have to come before the project requests federal assistance. ACIR also recommends similar review powers for projects that are not federally aided. These responsibilities would provide a tough test of the realism of metropolitan plans. It would require, as a matter of course, that metropolitan plans become a part of the area's political process. It would undoubtedly involve compromise and the mixing of politics with the more technical aspects of research, planning, and programming. It would mean, in short, that planners would have to "get their hands dirty." But there is really no alternative to this, except to continue to keep planning and implementation apart and to acknowledge that we do not expect planning to have much practical effect on our transportation systems.

CONCLUSION

Transforming existing metropolitan transportation planning organizations into general-purpose metropolitan decision-making bodies with policy control over implementation organizations will not be easy. There will be institutional difficulties as well as personal problems. But a number of our metropolitan areas have two decades of experience in transportation planning, and the techniques of capital improvement programming, investment analysis, multiyear budgeting, and project review and coordination have all been around long enough so that we can build a bridge between planning and implementation based on existing experience. In short, the techniques are largely available, and the real question is whether we have the will to apply them.