

Interurban Transportation Policy and the Rural Community

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Interurban transportation systems are designed primarily for the purpose of moving people and goods between metropolitan centers. However, the effect of these systems on the nonmetropolitan areas, which they also serve, raises the expectations and sometimes frustrates the hopes of the residents in small urban places. Since current policy trends have placed the transportation planner in the role of serving general social goals, this paper examines some of the resentments of small town residents that have resulted from their previous experiences with the development of the Interstate highway program. So that interurban transportation systems in the future may better serve the areas they affect, three policy proposals are offered to enhance the relation between transportation agencies and small communities: (a) an expanded notion of direct responsibility for the impacts of new facilities; (b) an extension of technical assistance to small communities; and (c) an expanded advisory role that involves greater cooperation among small communities, transportation agencies, and other planning and advisory agencies.

Transportation systems are, by definition, designed and constructed for the movement of goods and people from one place to another, but, as everyone knows, they effect much more than this. In fact, everyone expects these systems to accomplish, or help accomplish, other goals, or they would not have been built in the first place. It would be nice, in one way, if transportation were an end in itself. Then we would only be concerned about providing the most efficient and the safest means of getting from one point to another. In addition, if we had no social and environmental constraints and unlimited funds for developing new concepts, we would have a world that every transportation planner dreams about. Of course, not even the most frustrated transportation planner would want this dream to come true. The societal goals served by transportation systems are also the planner's, and it is the planner who is aware of the role transportation can play in accomplishing other ends.

The fact that transportation is not an end in itself poses no real problem. The problem lies in the rational pursuit of the goals that transportation systems serve—in determining priorities, in allocating resources, and

in meeting a multitude of often conflicting expectations under changing conditions. It is the pursuit of these goals that makes transportation policy a complex business. To choose one set of priorities is to acknowledge the restrictions of one's resources. To commit resources to one goal is to exclude other, perhaps equally desirable, choices. To satisfy one set of expectations is to frustrate another set and to arouse still others. Above all, the expectations aroused, satisfied, or denied by a given transportation system will enter and then reenter the equations of policy making as conditions change and are defined and redefined into what seems to be the rational way to accomplish the goals toward a greater social and economic well-being.

The present network of interurban highways is an obvious example of a system designed to serve a given transportation need and at the same time to promote goals connected with the general welfare. In addition to simply moving people and goods between large urban areas, the system was also intended to serve the aims of national defense and to reduce social and economic costs through savings in time, money, and lives. If these aims had remained constant, we could point to the present system as a model of efficiency for joining the means and the ends, and we would be happy with minor adjustments and improvements in technical design and in the analytic tools developed to create the system. But, as we watch the strains and stresses placed on cost/benefit analyses and the other procedures traditionally used to rationalize our choices, the accomplishment of the aims in the original policy has not been the end of a process. The unanticipated effects of the system itself, the changing economic and social conditions of the nation, and the expectations created by increased accessibility have forced us to reassess almost every aspect of the policies and programs that lie behind the present system.

EXPANDED ROLE OF THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNER

The changes in policy and accompanying legislation have explicitly imposed on the transportation planner a wider responsibility than that assumed 2 decades ago. As a result, the transportation planner must play a variety of

roles that include those of the sociologist, the environmentalist, and the arbitration expert. The planner is expected not only to develop efficient transportation systems and to integrate these with the long-term goals of society, but also to anticipate the future evolution of these same goals and develop ways to respond to the changing conditions and new expectations. One has only to look through the transportation-related publications over the last decade to recognize how fully that responsibility has been acknowledged and how thoroughly the expanded role of the transportation planner has been accepted. The breadth of the social, environmental, and economic goals identified as major concerns may be illustrated by reading some of the recommendations from the Conference on Transportation and Community Values held in 1969 by the Highway Research Board (now the Transportation Research Board). Among the basic social needs listed were personal identity and recognition, a voice in decision making, a sense of community or belonging, and stability and security. The basic economic needs listed include maintenance of economic stability of a community and growth, especially for the lower income and minority groups (1). These categories illustrate the broad context of transportation decisions and the difficulties transportation planners face in relating broad expectations to specific transportation decisions.

INTERURBAN SYSTEM IN NONMETROPOLITAN AREAS

Among the expectations we might have anticipated from the interurban transportation policies was that the Interstate system would potentially benefit the areas that lie between large urban centers. A natural result of the policy to upgrade the interurban system was to improve the accessibility of nonurban and nonmetropolitan areas within the transportation corridors that link major cities. In the context of the decline of rural areas, many people hoped that improved accessibility would justify the large investment in interurban highways by creating new growth possibilities in rural America analogous to those once created by the railroads.

Outside the small town of Smithville, Texas (population 3020), located roughly equidistant from Austin, Houston, and San Antonio is a weathered black and white sign that proclaims, "Welcome to Smithville, Heart of the Megapolis." Erected some time ago by some local booster group, the sign seems today both humorous and pathetic. It is humorous because not even the most sanguine Smithville resident has probably ever taken the boast with full seriousness. It is pathetic because it still represents the hopes aroused during the past 2 decades that towns like Smithville would not be among those towns left behind. As the residents watched the urban areas spread outward along the radii of transportation corridors and as terms like megapolis and golden triangle became household words, the residents of such small towns quite naturally assessed their future in terms of their positions in the new transportation network and in terms of the real and supposed benefits it could provide.

It might be argued that these expectations were not justified by the original policy to upgrade the highway system, but to do so would be to ignore both political realities and concomitant policies. Highways were seen by policy makers as potential sources of economic redevelopment, as witnessed by the decisions concerning Appalachia and the Connecticut Turnpike. Whatever the intentions behind the many impact studies commissioned by federal and state agencies, the general results were an increasing focus on the benefit to the nonuser and the

community and a justification for public expenditure on highways in terms of long-range benefits to all the areas served. Although no explicit promises were made to the inhabitants of towns similar to Smithville, there can be no question that some of the responsibility for their expectations rests with those who plan and construct transportation facilities and that future decisions must acknowledge this responsibility.

As the Interstate network, the major component of the interurban system, nears completion, we can use hindsight to reassess what was done in the light of what might have been done to promote the kind of goals that are now widely acknowledged to be in the province of planning transportation systems. With particular reference to rural areas, we might ask what the experience of the vast improvement of highways tells us about the planning of future transportation systems, of whatever kind, with the hope that we can adequately meet the responsibilities that such planning will entail.

RESENTMENTS IN THE RURAL COMMUNITY

It can be argued that many resentments in small rural communities are caused less by the transportation facilities themselves than by the rural resident's dependence on the policy maker and on the implementing agency. Recently, we were involved in an in-depth case study of the social and economic impact on one small community (population approximately 3000) that seemed to have clearly benefited from the construction of a portion of the Interstate system. The town's leaders had pursued a successful growth policy, and they attributed much of their success to the existence of the highway.

As part of the study, we administered a survey to a spatially random sample of the population. The formal portion of the survey required the respondents to evaluate the actual and potential effects that six transportation alternatives had on various attributes of the environment and life-style of the town. All of those interviewed were asked to rate the effect of each alternative on each of the attributes by using a scale of 1 to 7 (1 meaning very advantageous and 7 meaning very disadvantageous). A sample of the survey form is shown in Figure 1.

The attributes listed on the form (a total of 23) had been identified from previous research as significant to small town residents (2). Of the six alternatives, two represented actual situations and four represented hypothetical situations that had, at one time or another, been proposed to the community. For the two actual situations, there was a choice between the present Interstate facility and the previous intercity link (a two-lane, U.S. highway). For the most part, the Interstate facility was given higher ratings than the old facility. Not only did the Interstate rate higher on attributes such as attractiveness to industry, but it also generally received a higher number of favorable ratings on intangible attributes such as preservation of closer family ties and personal freedom. Table 1 gives the ratings for the four attributes that would be affected by the two highway alternatives. The ratings for these attributes were more favorable for the Interstate than for the old facility.

A complete analysis of the survey results has been published elsewhere (3). What is of interest to the subject of this paper is not simply the generally favorable response to the new facility, but rather the frequent contradiction between the ratings themselves and the informally expressed attitudes of the respondents. The interviews were usually 30 min. In the course of filling out the rating forms and providing background on socio-economic characteristics, the respondents often became interested in simply talking to the interviewers about

Figure 1. Sample of survey form to determine effects of transportation strategies on environment.

Environmental Attribute	TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM ALTERNATIVE					
	Before Interstate Highway	After Interstate Highway	Present Facilities Plus Train Stop	Improved Bus Service	No Bus Service	Local Intrastate Airstrip
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Preservation of family ties	6	1	4	4	6	2
2. Outdoor recreation	3	1	3	3	5	2
3. Personal freedom	7	3	3	3	6	2
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23. Personal privacy	5	2	3	3	6	1

Table 1. Number of responses by rating on four selected attributes for two alternatives.

Attribute	Rating	Responses	
		Before Interstate	After Interstate
Attractiveness to industry	1	2	57
	2	1	20
	3	7	11
	4	27	7
	5	16	3
	6	15	1
	7	32	6
	NR	10	5
Community land values	1	5	63
	2	4	14
	3	8	8
	4	21	5
	5	22	4
	6	8	1
	7	27	4
	NR	15	12
Personal preservation of family ties and friendships	1	8	28
	2	3	22
	3	8	7
	4	32	17
	5	12	2
	6	15	5
	7	20	0
	NR	13	7
Personal freedom	1	7	53
	2	3	11
	3	7	9
	4	35	21
	5	9	1
	6	9	1
	7	26	1
	NR	16	13

Note: NR = no response.

transportation policy and its effects on their lives. Sometimes this discussion provided us with clues for interpreting a respondent's rating on a particular attribute. For example, family ties were said to be stronger as a result of the new facility since it increased accessibility to family members who lived outside the community and it allowed the younger generation to remain residents of the town while commuting to jobs in a metropolis located some 80 km (50 miles) away. In many instances, however, the subject of the conversation was focused not on the advantages or disadvantages of transportation facilities per se, but rather on the local resentment toward state and federal transportation agencies and their representatives. The often-expressed view was, "They

[i.e., external agencies] do not care what we think and will do nothing for us." This view was also given as a frequent explanation for not participating in the survey.

In light of the fact that the new facility was generally rated as a positive influence on the community and in light of the fact that the town as a whole had pursued a successful growth policy closely tied to the construction of the freeway, the resentments expressed toward transportation agencies came initially as a surprise. As we worked with other small communities and with their representatives, we encountered a similar ambivalence: an attitude that was generally favorable to the construction of Interstate facilities but mixed with resentment toward the agencies who create and implement transportation policy. In part, this resentment reflects the general attitude in small towns toward extra-local authority that Vidich and Bensman (4) defined in their study of Springdale:

A central fact of rural life, then, is its dependence on the institutions and dynamics of urban and mass society. The recognition of this dependence and the powerlessness associated with it give to the agents and institutions of the great society a degree of respect and admiration which, however, does not always connote approval. Rather, there is a high degree of ambivalence with respect to these agents and institutions. They have respect because of their power and wealth, and because their norms have the legitimacy of acceptance in wide areas of the society at large. On the other hand, the very dominance of the mass institutions causes resentments, since, in the light of this dominance, rural life in its immediacy is devalued.

Thus, small town residents feel remote from the external authorities whose actions affect their lives. They feel incapable of understanding the rationale behind a great many decisions and do not see any meaningful way to contribute to the decision-making process because it is regarded as unaccommodating.

This general attitude is, however, only a surface indication of the specific resentments likely to be found among different groups in a particular community. In our discussions with residents of the case study community, specific kinds of resentment began to emerge that were typical of different groups.

1. Small business people felt that they were negatively affected by the decision of the state highway department to bypass the town; the decision was regarded as arbitrary.

2. Local merchants who were not immediately affected by the bypass felt that business suffered because of the change in commuter time to a nearby metropolitan area.

3. Many felt that outsiders with greater capital resources could move in and benefit from the best opportunities to the disadvantage of local investors.

4. Resentment developed toward local residents who were thought to receive unfair benefits at the expense of the community as a whole. (Although not expressed directly, this resentment is a reaction to the expectations that developed before the construction of the freeway: The town as a whole would experience a broad-based improvement in its life-style.)

5. In some quarters, a strong resentment developed against changes in the social makeup of the town. New residents who commute to the larger city are resented because they are not seen as having a stake in community life. Other groups in the community fear that new residents who are imported to work in the new industrial developments will cause social problems and displace local workers.

6. More directly attributed to the freeway are the complaints about the increase in traffic noise that is created in areas adjacent to the freeway, especially the noise of trucks entering the inclined on-ramps. Ironically, these complaints often come from people who purchased homes in new developments that were built adjacent to the freeway either during the construction period or after the freeway was in operation.

These negatively perceived changes in one community are directly or indirectly attributed to the presence of the Interstate highway. The list is representative of some of the characteristic complaints given by the residents of only one class of rural communities. Most of the complaints may seem relatively trivial when compared to the problems faced in dealing with the social disruptions caused by the construction of transportation facilities in urban areas.

These resentments are important because questions arise concerning the responsibility of the transportation planner for the potential social consequences of inter-urban transportation systems in small towns. Looked at objectively, few of the resentments enumerated above may be directly attributed to the intended function, location, or design of the new facility; therefore, most of the responsibility seems to lie outside the jurisdiction of transportation planners. In fact, many resentments are directed more toward other members of the community or private groups of outsiders than toward extra-local authority. However, in the context of the broad policy goals mentioned earlier, such negative perceptions become more significant. If the policy objectives for a transportation system can actually include value-related goals such as promoting personal identity and recognition, a sense of community, stability and security, and equitable economic growth, then the kinds of resentments we encountered within the community represent classes of problems that must be addressed when new policies are developed and strategies created for implementation.

THREE SOURCES OF RESENTMENT

To define and address the problems implicit in the resentments typical of small town residents, we might classify the sources of resentment as follows:

1. Resentments that may be directly attributed to the change in the transportation facility and can be measured,
2. Resentments that may be attributed to conditions resulting indirectly from a combination of local conditions and the change in the transportation facility, and
3. Resentments that may be attributed to the degree

of uncertainty that is associated with change and with the lack of local resources to assess probable futures in a reasonable way.

Some people might argue that only the first category lies within the immediate responsibility of transportation agencies. However, the role played by transportation in promoting social goals and the magnitude of importance attributed to transportation require the consideration of all three classifications in the formulation of new policies. This requirement is necessary for the small town in which the dependence on external agencies and the sense of helplessness this dependence fosters are themselves a social problem. Thus, a more responsive policy, aimed at reducing specific sources of resentment, would also be directed toward altering the often negatively perceived relation between the small community and extra-local agents and authorities.

IMPROVING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE COMMUNITY AND THE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

The problem is to make the relation between the community and external agencies more productive in terms of concrete programs. Even for the most obvious case of resentment created by direct changes in the system, there are barriers to establishing good relations created by funding limitations, measuring the impact objectively, and determining the appropriate measures of compensation. Meeting the other two sources of resentment presents less tangible but even more formidable barriers. Nevertheless, based on our own experience in rural communities, there are three general steps that can be taken by transportation agencies to reduce the major sources of resentment:

1. Expand the concept of direct responsibility to permit compensation for a wider spectrum of damages,
2. Extend direct technical planning assistance to rural communities by offering assistance that begins early in the project phase of facility improvement and that continues until the operational characteristics are established, and
3. Increase the levels of assistance and cooperation through the creation of a comprehensive planning group composed of citizens and representatives of planning and advisory agencies who will monitor changes and develop strategies for communitywide development.

The rationale for each of these steps and their application for reducing resentments in rural communities may be illustrated through reference to the specific resentments encountered in the study community.

Expand the Notion of Direct Responsibility

Most states will assume direct responsibility only for damages that occur incident to the taking of the right-of-way. Recent policy proposals have tended to recommend the expansion of the concept of responsibility to include areas that are affected outside the right-of-way. One such proposal suggests that impact measurement could be described in terms of a transportation impact zone and that compensation for losses within that zone could be computed as a part of project costs (5). The concept of an impact zone seems to be an essential and logical extension of the current legislative requirements that consider economic, social, and environmental impacts.

Blackburn and Oster (5), however, would limit compensation to owners of residential property within a boundary defined by strict noise pollution standards. The

usual practice of bypassing a rural community in highway construction normally eliminates many problems associated with impact on existing residential areas. The groups most immediately affected are usually those who are dependent on previous traffic flows for their businesses.

In the particular case of the study community, the measurably affected were those who owned traffic-serving businesses scattered along a 3.2-km (2-mile) stretch of the old U.S. highway. In addition to the immediate loss of revenue to particular businesses the construction of the new facility had two other effects. As a result of the controlled access facility, which had only one local interchange, the number of optimal sites was reduced. Since fewer operations would be serving an increased traffic flow, larger operations became economically feasible. Prices rose as outside investors became interested in the new sites, and, as a result, those who wished to relocate were priced out of the land market. The latter situation is connected with another source of resentment previously mentioned—the loss of benefits for the local people to outsiders. The investment of outside capital is not in itself negative, in fact it is usually desirable; however, most small towns will have a negative view of outside investment if it appears that individuals in the community will be at a disadvantage.

Although full compensation may not be justified for temporary losses, since future growth often works to offset initial drops in revenue, assistance payments for small businesses that were the most severely impacted could be made to cover a specific period of loss. Loans could also be made available to local residents for establishing partnerships that would combine previously separate operations and make them competitive with those that have greater resources.

The extension of the notion of direct responsibility has application to other problems in rural communities, especially after a facility becomes operational. In the case of highways, for example, changes in traffic patterns and density may make control measures necessary or desirable, even though the community may not be able to afford the expense of instituting such measures. The establishment of a more effective procedure to measure the need and funding for any post-project costs could alleviate the problems experienced in those rural communities in which there is no offsetting benefit. Problems connected with land use that arise either because the community lacks land use regulations in the vicinity of the facility or because the area is outside its jurisdiction might be handled through the tied-assistance payments suggested by Blackburn and Oster (5). In spite of the above criticism, the application of the Transportation Impact Zone Policy (5) to small communities is certainly worth more attention.

Extend Assistance for Direct Technical Planning

One of the central problems for rural communities is the lack of expertise in transportation planning. While technical assistance programs are available, it would seem desirable to extend assistance in handling local problems that may arise from the construction of a new facility. The monitoring of local problems by project personnel would be of great assistance and would not require any large increase in staff or funding.

One example of this problem was found in our investigation of the study community. The growth of new industry was concomitant with the development of the highway facility. It was not until some years after the facility had opened that the community, in the course of

developing a comprehensive plan under a federally sponsored grant, became aware of the future traffic problems posed by the location of the new industry. These problems and ones similar to these might have been anticipated earlier if local assistance had been extended as part of the Interstate project.

Increase Levels of Comprehensive Planning Assistance and Community Cooperation

Extending the notion of responsibility and providing technical assistance on a local level as a part of interurban system development would reduce the local resentments that arise from problems associated with the impacts of new facilities. However, most of the resentments enumerated could be abated only through a more extensive change in the relations among communities, transportation agencies, and other planning and advisory agencies. While it is impossible, for example, to financially compensate businesses suffering losses because of reduced commuter time to other sources of goods and services, it is possible to give advisory aid as part of a combined agency effort to prepare a community for transitions that are likely to result from a change in the transportation environment. Successful strategies have been developed for dealing with problems such as those faced by the retail merchants in the study community (6). The persistence of fears and resentments among those in this and other small towns is an indication that the accumulated knowledge and experience gained by experts in planning have not been passed on.

In the past, the major source of interaction between the rural community and the transportation agency has been the public hearing. Given the lack of resources and the traditional political reticence of small towns, the public hearing is too often a ceremonial event or merely a forum for the most active and vocal segment of the community. Within such a framework, there is little opportunity for the agency to discover the community's values to which it, theoretically, must be responsive. Although communities may seek aid from planning and advisory agencies, it is rare that the resources and the benefits of a multiple-agency planning effort are currently available.

There is, above all, an important goal that is related to reducing the small community's resentment. As one recent discussion of the enhancement of highway benefits suggests, an essential element in maximizing benefits and assuring their more equitable distribution is to make the community aware of its own powers and range of options (7). A coordinated planning effort, aimed at involving small communities in the identification of strategies appropriate for their own development, might reduce the specific causes of resentment related to future uncertainties and the general resentment against the paternalism of the external decision-making process.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper calls attention to some of the sources of expectation and resentment that small town residents perceive as resulting from the implementation of a major transportation facility in the immediate vicinity of their community. Although acutely aware of the benefits that may result from transportation programs such as the Interstate system, citizens of small communities remain skeptical of the intentions of planners and administrators. Ironically, the tangible benefits of past policies and programs have often helped fuel that skepticism. While, on the one hand, there seems to be a policy designed to help benefit small communities, on the other hand there

seems to be an apparent disregard for the problems that are peculiar to similar small communities. To many residents of small towns, the policies that are said to be designed for their interest seem only half-heartedly so.

Given the unique nature of transportation impact on small towns and the concomitant comprehensive planning needs of such communities, the following recommendations are offered in pursuit of a specific program for future interurban transportation policy.

1. A basic transportation plan that integrates the components of a comprehensive community plan for each small community within a designated interurban corridor should be developed concurrently with the transportation corridor system plan. This procedure would formalize the link between the community and the sponsoring agency and would provide a mechanism for making both parties aware of mutual problems. It would also provide the community with an introduction to basic planning and implementation techniques.

2. A formal update of the original plan should be conducted on a 5-year basis. In addition, a continuing link between the community and the sponsoring transportation agency would allow the community to request assistance in evaluating their transportation plan in light of unanticipated developments.

3. The sponsoring agency should advise a community that is likely to be impacted by an interurban facility about the particular planning services available from other regional and state agencies. This advice would ensure the community's awareness of the range of information required to develop an adequate transportation plan. The sponsoring agency could serve initially to coordinate the community's planning activity.

4. The criteria used to determine compensation for losses that are a result of the impact of a change in transportation facilities should be reexamined in regard to the problems of small towns. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss assistance programs in detail, it does seem clear from our own research that current assistance policy is a major source of resentment.

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