This paper relates the experience of metropolitan Dade County, Florida, in implementing an extensive, bilingual citizen participation program for planning the county’s proposed rapid transit system. The overall goals of the program are to ensure that local residents have the opportunity to contribute to the county’s transit plans and that public understanding, acceptance, and support of the system are achieved. To accomplish these aims, 25 neighborhood forums and 7 district citizens panels were created and integrated into the county government’s decision-making process.

The formation of these groups was part of a totally open community involvement process in which any interested resident could take part in the formulation of transit plans for each of eight time-phased decision points. During a 12-month period over 14 000 residents participated through 470 public meetings and hearings. Some of the major results of the program were the resolution of major community transit issues, significant citizen modification to the design guidelines and criteria for the system, and the establishment of long-term citizen participation structure. The success of the program has confirmed the value and feasibility of citizen participation in proceeding with the final detailed design and construction of the system.

Citizen participation in the planning of a rapid transit system in Dade County, Florida, is an excellent example of successful community-government cooperation. In planning the most significant public works project in the 79-year history of Greater Miami, residents were offered the opportunity to become intimately involved in shaping the future life-style and destiny of their community. From June 1974 through June 1975, 470 meetings were held and attendance was always encouraging. Below is a summary of the public involvement.

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In addition, representatives of all 27 municipalities in the Miami metropolitan area, the county’s state and federal legislators, and representatives of various state and local public agencies took part in the total planning effort.

CONCEPT

Conceived as a totally open, bicultural community involvement process, the program combined the town meeting atmosphere with a systematic planning process to arrive at major recommendations and decisions.

To give the program as broad a base as possible, a community participation structure was designed to integrate three geographic levels of public review and comment: neighborhood forums, representative district...
panels, and a countywide advisory committee. Any resident who wanted to participate in this structure could do so merely by expressing interest and by attending meetings.

As alternative concepts were developed by the consultants the public was given the opportunity to review these concepts plus source material used in development and to express preferences or suggest additional alternatives. Public participation was thus active rather than reactive. The role of the consultants was, therefore, to develop technically feasible alternatives and recommendations that met the expressed needs of local residents rather than merely to design a system and test the public’s reaction to it.

The citizen participation program had a significant impact on the county decision-making process. The role of the decision makers was not one of simply reviewing and approving a consultant design but of resolving conflicting public views and arriving at solutions that best served the greatest number of people. Although the concept provided that the ultimate decisions would be made by the elected county officials, it also ensured that these decisions would reflect the overall values, needs, and priorities of the community.

A fundamental aspect of the program is its long-term nature. Designed to provide citizen participation in preliminary engineering decisions, the program is also designed to continue to function through final design, construction, and initial operation of the transit system.

OBJECTIVES

The basic goal of Dade County’s transit improvement program has been to provide transportation facilities to meet the needs of the people of Dade County. To achieve this goal required identification of those needs, satisfaction of the needs to the extent that resources and technology would permit, and acquisition and maintenance of public acceptance and support to proceed with implementation of the project. Accordingly, the objectives of the citizen participation program were to

1. Determine the transit-related needs of the community as expressed by its residents,
2. Identify community priorities that residents assign to their perceived needs,
3. Maximize public awareness and support of the transit improvement program,
4. Maximize public participation in deliberations leading to transit-related decisions,
5. Save time and legal costs of extensive changes in plans and major construction, and
6. Provide final decisions that consider values, needs, and priorities of the community.

STRUCTURE

To achieve these objectives, a citizen participation framework was created to provide a flexible, formalized structure. An important consideration in setting up this framework was determining the amount of structure necessary to generate meaningful comments and suggestions from local residents. Too much structure would block the flow of citizen input vital to the success of the program; too little structure would lead to an unmanageable flow of data that would be impossible for the transit consultants to integrate into the plans. What resulted was a balance between these extremes: a structure that was adaptable to community differences, yet facilitated citizen input in a timely and orderly manner. In addition, the structure established a common meeting ground for interaction among elected officials, local residents, public agency officials, and transit consultants. Beginning at the grass-roots level the structure channeled the flow of information through three interrelated organizations as shown in Figure 1.

1. Public forums or neighborhood group meetings were held at convenient periods to discuss issues and concerns posed by the transit consultants and to interact with the citizen panels, the next organizational level of the citizen participation program.
2. Citizen panels were made up of designated representatives from the public forum and met openly with the county-consultant team to receive transit information, evaluate alternatives, raise issues, submit consensus recommendations, and provide representation at the next organizational level, the Transit Advisory Committee.
3. Transit Advisory Committee (TAC), established by county officials to advise the Board of Commissioners on transit matters, was composed of county commissioners, county officials, representatives of the citizen panels, and representatives of the state and other governmental and nongovernmental agencies.

A fourth level of participation, though not an organizational structure, was provided in the form of a public roster for those expressing a desire to be included on all informational mailings. The public roster was both a mailing list and communication network for over 4500 citizens and organizations who demonstrated an interest in the transit improvement program.

In addition, two other groups were established to expand the community’s input and recommendations to the consultant team; however, these groups were not part of the citizen participation structure.

1. The Public Officials Coordinating Council (POCC) was composed of designated representatives of the governing bodies of Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties as well as representatives of the major municipalities in Dade County, the Policy Committee of the Miami Urban Area Transportation Study (MUATS), the School Board, the Hospital Board, and the Dade County legislative delegation. The POCC provided policy advice and guidance on all public issues involving rapid transit.
2. The Transportation Technical Advisory Committee was composed of nationally known consultants who have expertise in transportation or related areas. This committee worked with county staff and consultants on specific technical issues raised and was in a position to advise on such matters.

The county was ultimately divided into seven regional forum districts by natural geographical boundaries (Figure 2). Each district had one citizen panel and two to five public forums. The number and boundaries of public forums in each district were determined by participating citizens and varied to accommodate travel distances to meetings, population densities in the community, and preferences of neighborhood residents. A total of 25 forums were created.

Each forum had at least three elected officers who made up the membership of the citizen panel for their district: a chairperson, a vice-chairperson, and a secretary. Similarly, each citizen panel had an elected president, vice-president, and secretary; the president and vice-president served as regular members of the TAC. The primary function of both forum and panel officers was to represent the consensus of their respective neighborhoods and districts in submitting community recommendations to the planners and decision makers. Thus, the interrelationship of these groups
was a key link in the citizen communication process. Special interest groups were actively sought as participants in the program by direct mailings to those on the public roster, various news media, the Transit Speaker's Bureau, and informal meetings with representatives of special interest groups. Input on major issues was obtained from these groups by active participation at the public forum level and citizen panel level or by appointments to the TAC standing and select committees.

The standing committees' major purposes were to ensure that the preliminary engineering activities proceeded as scheduled and according to the consultant's contract, to study each issue involved in its respective subject area so that adequate perspective was maintained, to monitor the quality of the consultant's work, and to report formally to the TAC.

The select committees were essentially ad hoc committees whose principal objectives were to review each Milestone report, monitor the work of consultants, and provide recommendations and professional opinions on the particular milestone topics assigned to them.

The consultant team interacted frequently with each of the standing and select committees to provide information and to receive input from the members. This interaction occurred mainly during regularly scheduled committee meetings and was initiated at the request of the committee chairperson.

**PROCESS**

To activate the citizen participation structure, a series of interrelated events and activities were implemented in three separate phases beginning in June 1974.

**Phase 1: Community Orientation Meetings**

Prior to the actual involvement of the citizens in the planning and decision-making process, a series of 29 orientation meetings was held throughout the county over a 2-week period. Approximately 1200 residents attended. The purpose of these meetings was to fully inform citizens about the transit improvement program and related activities. The meetings were held in conveniently located public buildings; Spanish and English were spoken. An average of four meetings per district were held.

The meetings consisted of a brief explanation of the purpose of the meetings, a short slide presentation highlighting the preliminary engineering and public improvement programs, and a question and answer period to clarify points raised in the slide show. Material printed in both Spanish and English was distributed that explained the preliminary engineering and how citizen participation would be incorporated into the planning process. Also distributed were citizen interest cards for those residents who wanted to be included on the public roster mailing list.

Notice of the meetings was extensively publicized by

1. Bilingual public service announcements on radio and television,
2. Mailings to over 2000 organizations and individuals on the county manager's mailing list and to a sample 6000 citizens on the registered voters list,
3. Mailings to 5400 organizations and individuals on the Third Century mailing list created for the local U.S. bicentennial celebration,
4. Personal contact with key organizational leaders to reinforce the need for their involvement in the program,
5. Posters and bilingual handbills on local buses encouraging transit riders to get involved and to contact the county's Citizen Information Service for details,
6. A special news conference by the vice-mayor of Dade County to brief media on meetings and to broaden public awareness of meetings and the role of citizens in the program, and
7. A special bilingual release to all newspapers, radio, and TV stations.

**Phase 2: District Organization Meetings**

Following the community orientation meetings, a public meeting was held in each district to organize concerned citizens at the neighborhood level into a network of public forums previously mentioned. Bilingual information publicizing these meetings was prepared and distributed to the public.

The mailings to the residents on the public roster contained notification of meeting dates, times, and locations; they also contained a tentative agenda for the meeting and a summary report on the community orientation meetings.

At the district organization meetings, conducted
jointly by members of the county-consultant team, over 900 residents were briefed on the program, presented organizational guidelines for discussion, and assisted in organizing their public forums and citizen panels.

Public forums created at these meetings varied in size from 15 to 150 people. (Throughout the course of the program an average of about 600 residents formed the nucleus of active participants.) Each forum elected officers, adopted a set of operating procedures similar to Roberts Rules of Order, and prepared to participate in the milestone decision process described below.

Prior to the start of this process, however, the forum officers from each district met at a county general meeting to form their respective district citizen panels and to elect panel officers.

**Phase 3: Milestone Decision Process**

The focal point for citizen participation in the preliminary engineering program was the eight project decision points or milestones. These milestones covered everything from development of design criteria to the recommendation of equipment, transit routes, station locations, safety and security features, and architectural-urban planning guidelines. For each of these milestones a comprehensive review and input process was jointly developed and implemented by the county-consultant team with the assistance of the forums and panels (Figure 3).

The initial activity in this process was a data presentation by the consultants to a series of formally scheduled district meetings of public forums. At these meetings each participant received a background report highlighting the major issues, alternatives, and items requiring citizen input for the particular milestone under study. Participants were also given a supplemental visual presentation to help clarify the written material and to answer general questions.

Residents were then given between 1 and 2 weeks to review the data, meet with their neighborhood forums, and submit written recommendations through their officers at a county general meeting of all seven district citizen panels. At the same time, members of the TAC and the POCC were also presented with data for review and comment.

During a 2 to 3-week interval, the consultants analyzed the various recommendations received from the community and prepared a draft milestone report. These reports contained the consultants' recommendations on the respective milestone and included the disposition of each suggestion submitted by the community plus the rationale for its acceptance, rejection, or deferral.

Following the identical sequence of events as the data presentations, the draft reports were then cycled through a second round of community review (i.e., district presentation, forum deliberation, and general meeting recommendations). During this stage, the TAC subcommittees assigned to a particular milestone conducted an in-depth analysis of the consultants' proposals as did the citizen groups and various federal, state, and local public agencies. This intensive analysis usually resulted in several meaningful revisions to the draft report. These changes, plus all other comments received, were reproduced by the consultants in a special addendum.

Once revised, the draft milestone report was ready for public hearings conducted by the Board of County Commissioners. From start to finish this two-step planning cycle took an average of 59 d and systematically laid the groundwork for the decision-making process.

The first step in the decision-making process consisted of formal public hearings. Following legally prescribed procedures, the hearings were held in the north, central, and south sections of the metropolitan area. A unique feature of the hearings was that citizen panel presidents copresided at the hearings with the county commissioners. Also, representatives of the neighborhood public forums attended the hearings.

Among the noteworthy by-products of these hearings were a number of well-founded suggestions, a good balance between pro and anti viewpoints, and a surprisingly constructive problem-solving atmosphere. This outcome was somewhat unique when compared to previous local hearings on transportation and was credited by observers to the open, participatory planning process established by the program.

Based on all of the community input received up to and including the public hearings, recommendations of the county transportation coordinator were then submitted to the Board of County Commissioners for action. Following such actions of the commission as adopting, accepting, and modifying a given milestone, the draft report and addendum were classified as a final report and this report was used as a basis for later planning.

**Figure 3. Milestone process.**
Because of extensive citizen input and revision, the final decisions made by the county commissioners incorporated to a great extent the views of the community.

RESULTS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

A key indicator in measuring the effectiveness of a citizen participation program is the extent to which local residents are able to influence the planning and decision-making process. The ability of the program to accomplish this aim depends to a great degree on the manner in which the consultants and the elected and appointed county officials respond positively to the proposals of citizens during milestone decision processes.

During the preliminary engineering program the interaction of citizens with the consultants and county officials evolved into an extremely constructive and productive exchange of needs, values, and priorities. A variety of significant results developed from this process.

Citizen Influence on Consultant Team Planning Process

Citizen participation in the planning process played a significant role throughout preliminary engineering in the recommendations and guidelines submitted by the consultants. Among major program outputs influenced strongly by citizen involvement were:

1. Definition of the county's 1985 Transportation Service Network,
2. Development and modification of the county's 1985 Rapid Transit Core System,
3. Modifications to the service criteria (approximately 25 percent),
4. Revisions to the system characteristics (approximately 20 percent),
5. Changes in the development and land use policies (approximately 50 percent),
6. Amendments to the safety and security criteria (approximately 15 percent),
7. Modifications in the station architectural criteria (approximately 30 percent), and
8. Major revisions in the environmental impact analysis (primarily in the evaluation of alternative transit systems and in the projections of noise and air pollution for the 1985 Rapid Transit Core System).

Public Influence on Citizen Participation Program

In addition to the substantive changes brought about through public involvement, a number of modifications were made to the citizen participation program. Among the major changes was the creation of an additional citizen panel district early in the program. The initial geographic structure called for six districts. However, during the community orientation meetings, residents in the city of Miami made a strong case for dividing the central district (Figure 2) into two separate districts to provide more equitable representation of this densely populated area. After reviewing the merits of the proposal, the county's project director authorized the change, thus creating a seventh district.

Another significant modification to the program occurred to citizen panel representation on the TAC. The original organization plan for the committee allocated only one slot for each panel president (or a total of seven citizens). However, feeling that this seriously diluted citizen influence on the committee, the panels requested that district vice-presidents also be given regular membership status (bringing the number of citizens on the TAC to fourteen). This request was also authorized.

Many other procedural and operational changes in the public program were brought about as a direct result of citizen influence.

Citizen Impact on County Decision-Making Process

Citizen influence on the county's decision-making process has been felt most strongly through three interrelated activities: citizen panel input into the project Milestone reports, participation on the TAC and its various subcommittees, and input submitted at the various public hearings conducted throughout the project.

The impact of these activities is best evidenced by the fact that the county's policy-making body, the Board of County Commissioners, has either adopted or accepted each of the eight draft milestone reports and the environmental impact analysis with little or no modification. Since each of these documents contained a substantial number of citizen recommendations, the final decisions made by the commission underscore the significance of public input and clearly demonstrate its impact.

Identification of Major Community Transit Issues

One of the primary and more beneficial outcomes of the citizen participation program has been the early identification of sensitive community issues relating to the transit program. By surfacing these issues early in the planning phase, the community has the opportunity to settle these issues in a timely and satisfactory manner.

Among the major community issues identified during preliminary engineering that will require resolution during future phases of the program are the restudy of route alignments and stations for two major north-south corridors, the feasibility and desirability of placing the main east-west corridor underground in the central business district of downtown Miami, and the timetable for possible provision of the rail service for northeast and northwest Dade County.

Model for Resolving Conflict on Major Community Issues

Through creation of the citizen participation structure and the milestone decision process, a systematic means of settling major transit disputes has been established (Figure 4). Although actual application of the model was adjusted to fit varying situations, the basic process was followed throughout the preliminary engineering program.

Among the issues that were addressed by using the model were the selection of a vehicle technology for the 1985 core system; the reexamination of ridership projections for transit corridors serving Miami Beach, northeast Dade County, and Hialeah; the location of a route alignment and stations for the Little Havana area; and the modification of the Hialeah rail segment in the 1985 core system.

Long-Term Citizen Participation Structure

Through efforts of the citizens and the county-consultant staff, the citizen participation program provided the residents of Dade County with a well-established framework for long-term community involvement in the planning and implementation of transportation. Any interested citizen can participate in this structure by...
requesting to be included on the Public Roster mailing list, by joining one of the 25 neighborhood public forums, and by seeking election to one of the 7 district citizen panels. Additionally, citizens can seek appointment to the TAC and its subcommittees.

LESSONS LEARNED

The experience of the Dade County Transit Improvement Program indicates the necessity and value of involving citizens in planning processes. The open two-way flow of information, ideas, and values is essential to attract and maintain community support of transportation improvements. However, to achieve effective communication with the community requires mutual trust and respect, timely feedback, a demonstrated willingness to accept valid suggestions, and frequent reinforcement by key decision makers.

Further, no one communication device is sufficient or can be universally applied; instead, a variety of specially tailored techniques and formats are required to achieve an open exchange of community viewpoints. During the course of the program we used all types of meeting formats: informational large-group assemblies; small, informal data-gathering sessions; subcommittee problem-solving workshops; large-scale community seminars; county input sessions; and informal meetings with individual community opinion leaders. These contacts with the community were supplemented with public information activities that included a transit speakers' bureau, special television and radio open-phone broadcasts, college and public school discussion programs, news conferences and releases, newsletters, storefront posters, bus cards, and shopping center exhibits.

Extremely vital to the community involvement process is the level of commitment by elected and appointed public officials and the technical consulting staff. Time after time, and meeting after meeting, these individuals were called on to address extremely complex issues, subject themselves to heated (and often unwarranted) criticism, and to somehow arrive at recommendations and decisions that properly balanced technical judgments with community needs and priorities. Without their intellectual and physical commitment to make this process work, the program might not have been able to establish and maintain its high level of integrity.

Also, without a corresponding commitment from participating residents, there would have been no citizen participation program. Their willingness to trust the process, to contribute long hours and hard work, to provide responsible leadership, and to keep pace with a demanding schedule of events was necessary for success.

Related to this point is the fact that citizen representatives were permitted to become regular members of the various key advisory committees created during the program. Citizen leadership, concerns, and insights contributed significantly to committee output and demonstrated the sincerity of county officials in using citizens at the highest planning and decision-making levels.

Probably the greatest difficulty encountered during the program was the constraint imposed by the project timetable. From start to finish, the citizen participation program took place in 12 months. Yet during that time citizens had to become fully oriented, organized, and involved in the technical planning process. Although citizens primarily played an advisory role (rather than a decision-making role) they were constantly being pressured to rapidly assimilate large amounts of data in relatively short time periods. Even with staff assistance in pinpointing key areas requiring citizen comment, the schedule frequently became overly demanding.

Similarly, the tight schedule created a terrific time pressure for the county-consultant team. The technical staff was continually striving to meet seemingly unrealistic report deadlines while attending three to four evening citizen meetings a week. This schedule resulted in an estimated 1918 program overtime hours (27 percent above the original estimate). No major deadline was missed; however, the program's rigorous schedule required almost a double workload for the technical staff during peak activity.

Another problem related to time was the difficulty in providing an ample follow-up period to allow participating citizens to reach closure on a given decision point and to see the results of their efforts before proceeding with the next milestone. This problem was further complicated when, during certain periods, residents were simultaneously involved with three or four milestones, each at different stages of review. Yet, despite these handicaps, somehow citizen participants were able to work their way through the maze of data.

Finally, because of the duration and intensity of the program, sustaining a high level of citizen interest and involvement became difficult at times. Although we anticipated high and low community interest, depending on the issue under study at the time, we found offering sufficient
incentives to continually motivate large numbers of residents for each milestone almost impossible; e.g., some issues would draw several thousand participants, and others would attract only a few hundred.

Early in the program the staff learned several things. First, because of the number of neighborhood forum groups, the schedule of community meetings to process technical data, and the related activities required to support these activities, our public involvement specialists and transit planners were too few to adequately cover activities. As a result, staff support for citizen meetings had to be put on a reservation and priority basis. Although we were able to provide some staff coverage for most meetings, there were occasions when citizens had to struggle through technical data without the benefit of an appropriate consultant on hand.

Also, some support services requested by citizens (e.g., clerical work, special mailings, graphic materials, and personal expenses) had to be provided by the participants. The county-consultant public involvement staff was continually trying to balance adequate staff support without overcommitting limited resources.

Expenses for the citizen participation program stayed reasonably close to the project budget. Projected originally at $159,981, the actual cost ran $171,538, or 7 percent above forecast. Considering that the original scope of work was greatly expanded and that numerous unforeseen expenses occurred (primarily because of the heavy meeting load and increased public information materials), this overrun was not considered excessive. Quite to the contrary, we were surprised that the program was able to accomplish as much as it did on a relatively lean budget. However, much of this economy was due to the fact that many of the services and materials used were provided without cost or at cost by our suppliers and public relations subconsultants.

Another interesting facet of the program was acceptance by local politicians and by the media. At first concerns were expressed about the possibility of elected municipal officials perceiving the public program as a threat to their power and influence. Again, to the contrary, we were pleasantly surprised to find that local officials were extremely receptive to the program and frequently endorsed proposals and recommendations of forums and panels in their communities. This reaction reflects not only the responsiveness of these officials but also the capability of the county's project director and his staff to create a climate of mutual respect and understanding between the metropolitan government and the cities. Without this climate the program would probably not have achieved its objectives.

Similarly, the mass media proved to be extremely cooperative and impartial in reporting the program's various activities and events. Hardly a week went by without a major article or report appearing on the transit program and the public's involvement in it. Coupled with the efforts of our communication consultants, this coverage was indispensable in reinforcing citizen efforts and in reaching all levels of the community.

CONCLUSION

Final judgments of the merits of citizen participation in metropolitan Dade County's rapid transit system cannot be made until the system is built and operating. Whether the system does, in fact, gain the full acceptance and support of the community remains to be seen.

Also, a key factor in constructing the system is securing necessary federal funds. In August 1977, the county had applied to the Urban Mass Transportation Administration for these funds.

Nevertheless, certain conclusions can be drawn. Among these is the fact that this program, to our knowledge, represents the most extensive citizen participation effort of its kind in the preliminary engineering of a major rapid transit system in the United States. Although other urban areas have established public programs in the design and construction of transit systems, these areas have not been in a position to involve such a broad cross section of the community in the early planning and decision-making stages.

Also, the program has enriched and strengthened the data base for the final design and construction phase of the system. The guidelines and criteria established as a result of citizen input will provide the project's final design team with a comprehensive framework for initiating work on this phase.

In addition, the program sensitized transit planners and policy makers to the needs of the community and surfaced major transportation issues that require further study and resolution. These outcomes alone are extremely significant accomplishments.

Finally, the program has confirmed the value and feasibility of the participative process in urban problem solving. Because of the growing feeling of alienation and impotence experienced by many residents in metropolitan areas, there is an increasing need to provide citizens with genuine opportunities for involvement in controlling their collective destiny. Dade County's Citizen Participation Program has made an excellent start in that direction.