

Public Involvement in Paratransit Planning

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Repeated rate increases, allegedly declining levels of service, and growing community dependence on public transit due to rising costs of living and energy shortages brought the Dade County, Florida, taxi system under sharp criticism. Transportation planners found that analyzing the situation and recommending corrective measures were complicated and difficult because of the largely unregulated, traditionally private-enterprise nature of the taxicab industry. A taxi study task force was, therefore, established that consisted of industry representatives from fleets of every size, local governmental officials, and (after a series of public hearings) interested citizens. Administrative and regulatory alternatives and possible operational improvements were presented to the task force for review and comment. The alternatives ranged from partial to complete control of the taxi industry by Dade County. The task force concluded that uniform county regulation of taxicab service was essential, and legislation providing for county control of the taxi industry was passed by the Florida General Assembly in June 1974. A model ordinance to establish a taxicab bureau with county jurisdiction was then submitted to the taxi task force and later approved and passed in modified form by the county commission. By late 1975 the county became involved in rate making and also in requesting the taxicab industry to provide service to the transportation disadvantaged. An important outcome has been the continuance of the taxi task force, which perpetuates cooperation among citizens, government, and industry concerning transportation service issues that affect all.

In most urban areas, taxis carry less than 3 percent of all person trips; in the Miami urban area, taxis carry less than 1 percent of all person trips. Although planners forecast this market share will not exceed 1 percent in the future, current taxi service is receiving considerable attention largely because of numerous increases in taxicab rates. Taxi rates have gone up six times in the last 10 years, most recently in October 1975. Service in Dade County's major municipalities costs \$0.88 for the first kilometer (\$1.40 for the first mile), \$0.50 for each additional kilometer (\$0.80 for each additional mile), and \$8/h for waiting time.

In January 1974 a 90-d study was initiated by metropolitan Dade County to define the personnel and operating economies of the taxicab industry, to analyze existing

regulatory and administrative procedures governing daily services provided by the industry, and to integrate consumers' perceptions of taxicab industry performance with those of industry members and government officials responsible for regulating and administering the industry.

The 90-d study period (January 1 to March 31, 1974) was set to allow for preparation of any state legislation that might be recommended (the Florida General Assembly convenes between April 1 and June 30). In fact, legislation was drafted and subsequently passed by the General Assembly and signed by the governor in the summer of 1974. This legislation is intended to improve service to the Dade County consumer and provide consistently fair returns to owners and operators through more uniform, equitable regulation by one public body (in this case Dade County) rather than by 27 individual municipalities within the county.

PARTICIPATION PROCESS

The study's decision-making process is shown in Figure 1. A task force of government, industry, and consumer representatives was established at initiation of the project; the county manager selected approximately 12 members from government offices concerned with regulating and administering taxicab services and asked the taxicab industry (through such organizations as the Southeast Florida Taxicab Association) to select approximately 12 representatives. The industry's representatives were taxicab owners, operators, and others (attorneys) familiar with the taxi industry. The fleets represented ranged from very small (5 or fewer taxis) to relatively large operations (50 taxis or more). Government representatives were selected from the Office of the Transportation Administrator, the Metropolitan Transit Authority, the Dade County Department of Traffic and Transportation, the Dade County Department of Aviation, local police forces, the Florida Department of Transportation, and the Dade County League of Cities.

Approximately 24 consumers, nominated from among people who had involved themselves in a public meeting process dealing with the taxicab issue, were invited to participate, and approximately 18 actively took part in the decision-making process. They represented

senior citizens, minority groups, professionals, housewives, and young people.

Selection and Involvement

The involvement of consumers, industry, and government representatives began immediately at six public meetings conducted throughout Dade County to help define taxicab service needs. These needs were subsequently analyzed and became the basis for recommendations for improvement of taxicab services in Dade County.

Considerable activity attended the public meetings. Two weeks before the first meeting, the meeting activities were announced at a press conference. During the following 2 weeks all media devoted generous space to the time and location of each meeting. More than 100 organizations such as civic groups, hotels and motels, retail outlets, and food chains were contacted to enlist support in advertising the meetings, and 1000 invitations were mailed to various interest groups and individuals in the county. Also, approximately 30 000 flyers were mailed, distributed door-to-door, and placed in Metropolitan Transit Authority buses and at the Miami Inter-

national Airport. A public hearing was aired on the radio station that has the largest audience of any station in Dade County, and 22 individuals called and spoke over the air. Few callers mentioned their names and none gave an address; therefore, their continued involvement in the taxicab program could not be solicited. However, their comments were documented and addressed in the analysis portion of the taxicab study.

Attendance at the six public meetings averaged approximately 30 persons; about a third of these voiced taxi service needs. The taxicab industry was well represented; in fact, overall, about 30 percent of the attendees were individuals involved with the Dade County taxicab industry. A significant number of the speakers at the meetings were representatives of the taxicab industry, most of whom were the taxicab industry members of the task force. The taxicab industry was obviously interested in the public meeting process and felt free to express its feelings concerning the taxicab situation in Dade County.

Taxicab service needs expressed at each of the six meetings and on the radio program were documented (and subsequently published), tabulated, and categorized

Figure 1. Dade County taxicab study process.

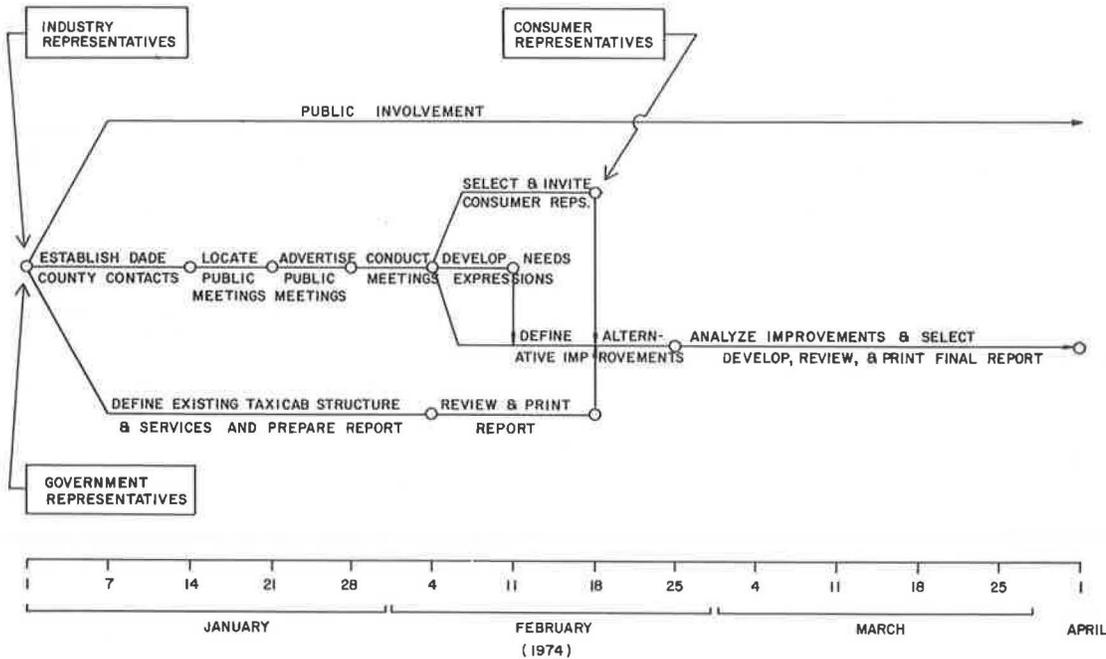


Table 1. Categories of taxicab service needs.

Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
Examine taxicab fares	Improve taxicab driver safety	Employ intermediate-sized cars as taxicabs
Improve taxicab driver courtesy	Improve and unify regulation and administration of taxicab system	Establish system of more rigorous and frequent taxicab inspection
Establish control of taxicab service in unincorporated areas	Employ taxicabs in social-service delivery system	Institute countywide identification cards for taxicab drivers
Improve airport taxicab service	Institute taxicab package delivery system	Integrate taxicabs with rapid transit system
Improve taxicab service to senior citizens	Subsidize taxicab rides	Integrate taxicabs with other ground access modes
Examine opening county	Improve taxicab service in Model Cities area	Give taxicabs preferential treatment
Reduce deadheading		Establish taxicab boards
Allow multiple-occupancy taxicab service		Prohibit smoking in taxicabs
Improve service to handicapped		Improve taxicab information display at airport
Institute reduced-rate taxicab programs		Create an emergency taxicab service
		Institute reading and writing tests for taxicab drivers
		Establish regional taxicab posts in suburbs
		Establish zone fare system
		Establish taxicab service contracts with employers
		Establish fixed-route and scheduled taxicab service
		Reduce time spent waiting for taxicab

so that they could be addressed in developing alternative improvements to the Dade County taxicab system. The needs expressed at all six meetings were grouped into three categories (Table 1):

1. Those needs expressed most often during the public meetings process,
2. Those concerning the physical aspects of taxicab transportation, including driver safety and use of taxis for providing social services and delivering packages, and
3. Those least frequently mentioned.

Category 1 needs conformed closely to the specific objectives of the project originally defined by Dade County. In other words, the needs most often expressed by the community were also those perceived earlier by metropolitan government when it prepared the work program from which the taxicab study was developed.

Alternative Evaluation

Approximately 6 weeks (half of the 3-month study period) were needed to recognize, invite, and involve the consumers in the taxicab study task force. During this period industry and government representatives interacted during six meetings to define study objectives, intricacies of the taxicab industry's structure, and current levels of taxicab service. A 400-page volume of the three-volume study reported on these issues and also included the needs expressions obtained during the public meetings. Because of the different degrees of momentum brought to the process by consumers on the one hand and the industry and government representatives on the other, the decision was made that the two groups' activities be juxtaposed but not fully integrated. Therefore, consumers met separately from the industry and government representatives during the last 6 weeks of the study although meetings were often conducted in adjacent rooms. The same information was presented to both.

This separation did not compromise the result of the study process; in fact it strengthened the process because the consumer component was not intimidated by a lack of understanding of the technical details of taxicab problems, which could have become a large problem because of the time constraint. This allowed the consumers to interact freely among themselves and to express their criticisms and concerns without reservations. However, in the future, consumers should be fully involved with the industry and government members of the task force. More information on this is included in a later section of this report.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In response to needs expressed at public meetings and from discussions of the taxicab study task force, two categories of alternatives were developed: regulatory-administrative and operational. In essence, two administrative alternatives were considered that had a number of operational innovations that could increase the desirability of Dade County taxi services.

Regulatory-Administrative Alternatives

The 17 municipalities regulating the taxicab industry in Dade County are not uniform in enforcement or extent of their taxicab ordinances. To ensure improved taxicab service and protection of the reputation and investment of professionals in the taxicab business, more order and uniformity should be brought to regulatory

and administrative functions of agencies responsible for industry policing.

Alternative A: Central Regulation and Local Administration

Alternative A (Figure 2) proposed that a metropolitan taxicab bureau be established by the Dade County commissioners to carry out regulatory and administrative functions. The taxicab bureau would be responsible for policing the taxicab industry in the unincorporated areas of Dade County and in those municipalities without taxicab ordinances. The taxicab bureau would also be responsible for monitoring municipalities with ordinances to ensure proper enforcement of minimum taxicab performance standards established in the county ordinance.

Under this plan municipalities would have the right to pass and enforce ordinances that contain at least minimum requirements established in the county ordinance. If a municipal ordinance met the minimum requirements and was properly enforced, the taxicab bureau would have no involvement in that municipality's taxicab affairs.

Municipalities that have no ordinances regulating taxicabs, do not elect to upgrade their current ordinances to minimum requirements, or do not enforce the minimum requirements would be relieved of the responsibility for regulating taxicabs. This responsibility would be assumed by the taxicab bureau under the direction of the county commissioners. The taxicab bureau would assume the functions and responsibilities now being performed by the Florida State Public Service Commission for the unincorporated area of Dade County and for municipalities without ordinances. These functions would include issuance of Certificates of Public Necessity and Convenience and taxicab permits.

The 17 municipalities now set taxicab fares for their jurisdictions, and the Public Service Commission sets fares for the remainder of the county. Rates in the municipalities are generally determined through a public hearing process. Justification for rate increases is based on statements prepared by the taxicab industry showing increases in the cost of operation. Typically, rate increases granted by a few of the larger municipalities prompt the others to follow suit. For taxicabs operating in the unincorporated areas of the county, rates may be changed simply by informing the Public Service Commission of the change. No hearing is required. Neither the municipalities nor the Public Service Commission undertakes a rigorous rate-making process in which requests for rate changes are accompanied by detailed financial and operating statements furnished by the taxicab industry.

Under alternative A, the taxicab bureau would assume rate-making responsibility for the total county including all municipalities. This process would allow standardization of taxicab rates and would ensure that rate changes result from a factual determination of financial need of the taxicab operation to make a reasonable profit.

Alternative A requires legislative changes at both state and local levels. Therefore, the study recommended state legislative changes in concept and proposed a detailed ordinance for consideration by the task force. Staffing recommendations were also made, accompanied by cost and revenue projections defining the financial implications of operating the taxicab bureau. A detailed specification of rate making was also suggested for alternative A.

Alternative B: Central Regulation and Central Administration

Alternative B (Figure 3) proposed that uniform regula-

tion be accomplished throughout Dade County by creating a centralized metropolitan taxicab bureau responsible for policy and procedural decisions. The bureau would be directly responsible to the commissioners of Dade County and would be responsible for administrative aspects of regulation, except for entry control. Entry control would be a cooperative function between municipalities and the taxicab bureau, but the municipalities would retain their right to grant the privilege of operating a taxicab within their corporate boundaries. Staffing, cost-revenue projections, legislative concepts, and rate-making procedures were also specified for alternative B.

Operational Alternatives

A number of physical improvements to taxicab service were recommended in the study. Although several (such as central dispatch) would require subsidization and would be more compatible with alternative B, these concepts were presented to the task force for review and comment.

Taxicab Pooling

Taxicab pooling involves small groups of users who have similar origins, destinations, and time schedules and who hire a taxicab on a regularly scheduled basis. This group is considered a single client for fare purposes. When the common fare is shared, the cost per taxicab pooler is reduced. In the combination of contributions, however, the taxi operator usually ends with a greater amount than he would have collected from one rider. Both passengers and drivers thus benefit from the arrangement.

Advantaged Taxicab Flow

Metropolitan Dade County is currently operating advantaged flow lanes to speed mass transit travel on I-95 and South Dixie Highway. These facilities could also be used by taxicabs. Priority treatment for taxicabs would mean faster and more reliable service, higher overall travel speeds, and lower operator costs and fuel consumption. Increased speeds, in turn, might translate to increased demand for taxicab services.

Figure 2. Taxicab improvement alternative A.

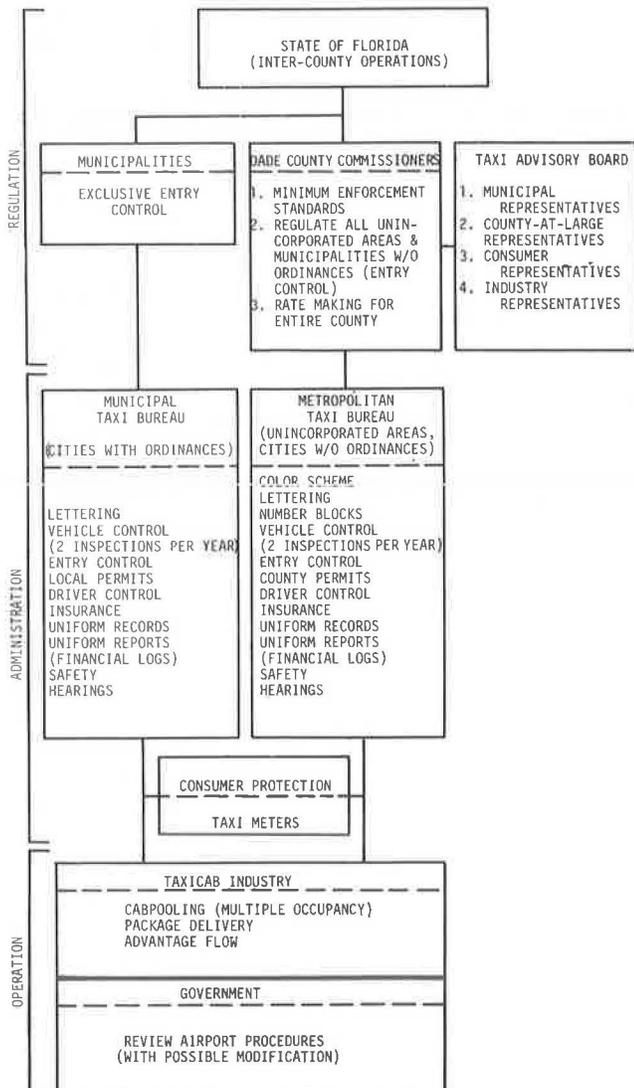
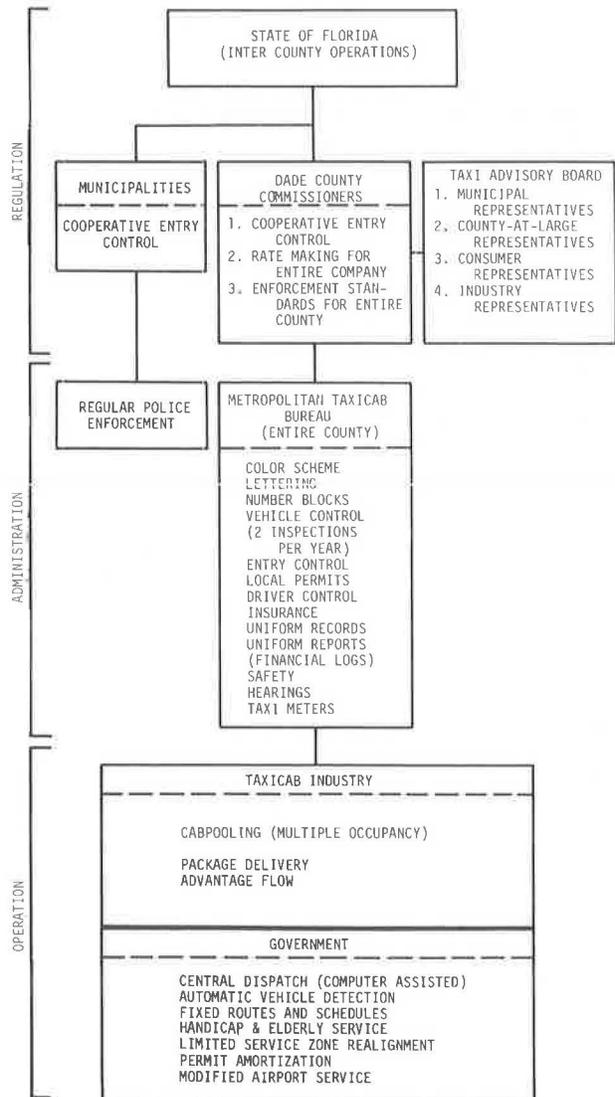


Figure 3. Taxicab improvement alternative B.



Package Delivery Service

Although taxicab service has been used exclusively to transport people, recently the service has become accepted for package delivery. Package delivery services have reportedly increased the number of trips of a taxicab company by as much as 15 percent.

Central Dispatch

In its most basic form, central dispatch would require dividing the county into three service zones. Each zone would have its own broadcast channel, dispatchers, telephone operators, and other personnel. All cabs operating in the zone, regardless of company affiliation, would be dispatched from a zone-based station. Basic central dispatch implies computer operation and automatic vehicle monitoring from one location. Central dispatch would further improve control over the total taxicab operation so that users of the system would be better served and more effective use would be made of each taxicab.

Analysis of Improvements

Results of an analysis of operational improvements are shown below.

<u>Operational Improvement</u>	<u>Average Daily Taxicab Person Trips</u>
Do nothing	52 414
Taxi pooling	55 450
Advantaged flow	55 638
Central dispatch (without computer)	61 537
Central dispatch (with computer)	67 560

Pooling and advantaged flow result in an approximate increase of 3000 trips/d over the do-nothing alternative. Central dispatch without computer assistance results in an approximate 20 percent increase, and central dispatch with computer assistance results in a 30 percent increase in average daily trips.

Analyzing the effects of other improvements such as special service to the handicapped and elderly, fixed routes and fixed schedules, or improved service to the airport was more difficult. However, these concepts were discussed with the task force, and operational innovations were recommended to be implemented on a daily basis.

PARTICIPATION PROCESS RESULTS

The regulatory-administrative and operational alternatives were presented to the task force at a series of meetings conducted in March 1974. At first, industry representatives were extremely skeptical of the value of the operational alternatives and somewhat resistant to changes in the rather loose regulatory-administrative framework that was in existence. Discussion among committee members was vigorous and often heated. However, because of the completely open and interactive process and as a result of an 8-h marathon meeting, task force members finally concurred in the administrative concepts. The task force also agreed that more uniform control of taxicab service was necessary to protect both the industry and the consumer and that state legislation should be broad enough to allow creation of a mechanism for countywide control. However, before that control was finally designed and implemented, all ordinances and other administrative procedures, particularly rate making, should undergo task force review.

Consumer members of the task force believed that

full and immediate countywide control of taxicab services was essential. As a result, the compromise position stated above best reflected the overall opinion of the task force membership that improvements to the taxicab system would have to take the form of more stringent regulatory-administrative control dispensed in small yet effective doses.

As a result of task force action, legislation was introduced to the Florida General Assembly in May 1974. Before the session concluded in June 1974, the bill had been passed and signed into law by the governor. The new law allows counties to control taxicab enterprises although some responsibilities are shared with municipalities who exercise responsible control of taxicab systems within their jurisdictions. In October 1974, following passage of this legislation, a proposed ordinance was presented to the taxicab study task force for review and comment. Later the ordinance was introduced to the county commission; in March 1975, the ordinance, as modified, was passed and the Taxicab Bureau was established that now is staffed by an executive director and two assistants.

The Taxicab Bureau submitted a series of rate-making procedures to the task force in the summer of 1975. These procedures were put into effect shortly afterward, and in October 1975 the county established a new rate structure. However, this new structure is effective for 90 d only. In that period, more and better data are to be provided by the industry and recommendations are to be made on new permanent rates, flat fares rather than metered rates, techniques for reducing deadheading, and the effects on taxicab productivity of opening the airport and other restricted areas in the county to all taxicab operations. These actions, in combination with the pending execution of a contract between the county and several taxi companies to provide subsidized service to the disadvantaged, mean that the Metropolitan Taxicab Bureau has initiated action on 8 of the 10 category 1 needs within 9 months of the bureau's creation.

OBSERVATIONS

Over the past 10 years the taxicab issue in Dade County has created controversy and anger. The industry has been increasingly criticized and pressured by consumers and newspapers. As a result, industry owners and operators have found themselves unpopular and in disagreement with the community and often with governmental officials, who must protect public interests.

In response to this public pressure, government officials made numerous attempts to initiate a taxicab study. After 3 years of unfinished studies, this project was initiated in January 1974. At that time, the taxicab industry was itself divided over whether to participate in the study process. Several owners and operators believed participation in the process would be equal to permitting the Trojan horse to enter their domain. However, most of the industry's leaders were convinced that only through cooperation could they influence the future course of action and thereby effectively protect the investment they had developed. Therefore, the industry entered into the participation process with a cautious willingness.

In hindsight, it can be reliably stated the taxicab industry is suspicious by nature. This condition is largely caused by financial pressure and a belief by the industry that it is harassed by the news media. To minimize the problem, government must be open and candid in its dealing with taxi owners and operators and dialog must be as continual as possible. Infrequent meetings dealing with inconsistent topics must be avoided; if not, considerable ground can be lost. This situation is typified by

the relative lack of cooperation between industry and government over the rate-making issue considered in the fall of 1975. Less than 15 percent of industry representatives completed survey forms on which an objective and fair decision on rate increases could be made. This situation arose, in part, because too little contact was made with the industry on the rate-making issue (no more than two meetings in 9 months). To recover from this position, the county granted a provisional rate of fare largely acceptable to the industry for 90 days while cooperation could be reestablished and more detailed rate-making analyses were conducted.

Throughout the study, gaining cooperation was often a risky task, for each task force member had to respect the others' right to disagree while trying to move toward the goal of taxi system improvement. For example, throughout the participation process, discussions on administration and regulatory controls were quite energetic and sometimes heated. However, the county promised the task force members an open and constructive forum, and at no point did interaction among members threaten to dissolve the task force. As a result, members, particularly taxi industry representatives, felt that they could freely express their views, however biased, and thereby influence the process; indeed, they were not without strength.

The time schedule on the study was both a blessing and a curse: a blessing in that it seemed to channel all meetings to a constructive conclusion, and a curse because it allowed only hurried involvement of the consumer. In the future more time and attention should be allotted to consumer involvement.

Although the segregation of consumers from the remainder of the task force encouraged freedom of expression, a more structural, integrated community involvement program is required if the community is to gain a more factual understanding of both the problems and opportunities associated with taxicab services. An organized approach is especially important to the advent of Dade County rapid transit development. The future of taxicab operations can be enhanced if more dialog (in proportion to that afforded rail rapid and bus transit) occurs; the future of taxicab services will be seriously threatened if this opportunity for dialog is not provided.

This concern over more community involvement is heightened by the fact that no direct input has been recently sought from the consumer. Although opportunities to discuss taxicab issues have been afforded at public hearings, discussions on ordinances, rate making, and so forth have been formally addressed only by government and industry representatives. This disregard of the citizen is inconsistent with the study's recommendation for a taxi advisory board. Immediate action on more direct consumer involvement should be taken before credibility is damaged.

Lack of funding appears to be a problem for continued study and implementation of taxi activities. All taxi work in Dade County to date has been accomplished by use of local and state funding. Paratransit appears to be gaining increasing attention at the federal level; serious consideration should be given to assisting local communities to study the role of taxis in the total transportation system. Such assistance would allow for more active, concerted interaction of the public, industry, and government on the taxi service issue.

CONCLUSION

Metropolitan Dade County, which expects to grow in population to more than 2 million people by 2000, is giving attention to the development of a fully multimodal transportation system. Although most attention is directed

to highway, bus, and rapid transit modes, officials recognize the importance of paratransit modes. As a result of this study and the continuing involvement of the study's task force, effective dialog among consumers, transportation suppliers, and government regulators has produced improvements in a heretofore extremely criticized segment of the transportation system. In effect, Dade County has demonstrated that involvement of all parties affected by a transportation system can lead to development of improvement concepts that can be implemented.