

Monitoring Nationwide Trends and Comparing Metropolitan Areas

Marshall Reed

I am Marshall Reed of the Highway Users Federation for Safety and Mobility, known as HUFSAM to many of you. The Federation is a national organization that brings together highway using and business groups. It works for safe, efficient, and economical highway use in the public interest.

I am here today on behalf of HUFSAM and a number of other organizations to discuss with you a project we have initiated to produce a nationally comparable data set that will describe the important urban commuting trends using the census journey-to-work statistics.

Stimulated by a meeting called by the President of HUFSAM, a group of representatives of organizations decided to join together in a project to summarize and publish national trend information about the current state of urban development and the commuting patterns it produces. We recognized that each of our organizations could use such a document as an information source in our individual activities and public policy makers and the general public also would benefit from an objective, easy-to-understand description of these trends.

The organizations that came together in this project initially included the Urban Land Institute, the National Association of Regional Councils, the Institute of Transportation Engineers, National Association of Counties, National Governor's Conference, the National Conference of State Legislators, and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Frank Francois of AASHTO serves as our Chairman and the Urban Land Institute serves as our administrative center. We now officially call our undertaking the National Commuting Study. Let me tell you a little more about it.

We have been working together now for almost a year; a technical committee has been working on the analytical issues, and a steering committee has been dealing with administration and overall policy. We have produced a prospectus of the planned activities of the study and received initial funding from our membership.

The work plan has several parts. The first part will assemble 1980 census data on commuting in America providing current data on the socioeconomic characteristics of the population, distributional patterns of residences and work places, and commuting patterns of the U.S. population. Comparable historical data for 1970 and even 1960 will be assembled where available, so we can describe the trends over the last 20 years. These will be summarized by city size, city type, and other characteristics to best depict current patterns and trends. Text will be used to interpret the data and describe the trends only. No policy or programmatic implications will be discussed. All of our participating organizations agree that this will be an information document, not a policy document.

An important accomplishment of the program to date has been that working with federal officials, we have received agreement that FHWA with UMTA assistance will produce large-scale national commuting summary data files from the census. These will be an important resource for our study and for other researchers and public agencies. Preparation of these files is now under way.

Another part of our program will be the preparation of a number of case studies in individual cities. We feel that these are needed to present a more detailed picture of trends that can be accomplished using only aggregated national statistics. We would expect that the UTPP would be valuable as a source for these case studies. The case study effort will be a wholly voluntary activity with a format jointly agreed on by the local entity and our technical subcommittee. We are finishing the definitional work now on what these case studies should contain. As soon as that is complete we will identify areas of interest for our document and solicit local entities to participate. Cities or regions will be selected based on the degree of national interest in the story that have to tell. For instance, areas that have had large population or economic shifts in recent years or significant transportation system changes, such as new transit system, would be of high interest.

The document we produce from all of this material will be broadly distributed as an informational tool about current commuting trends. We believe that such a document will be a valuable educational device in public discussions in the future.