

Panel Discussion: Transportation Issues and Information Needs in the 1990s

Alan Pisarski chaired this open discussion of prospective 1990 data requirements. In his opening remarks he urged the audience to participate freely in what was intended to be an informal session. He introduced the three speakers, whose remarks were intended to stimulate thinking and discussion of data requirements for the 1990s.

George V. Wickstrom:

It is trite but true to say that data should respond to needs and not vice versa. A review of transportation issues over the last 30 years discloses a simple fact of life: As the urban area expands, more, not less, detail is needed within the urban area. The 1970s saw the birth of subarea and corridor planning, just as the 1960s dealt comprehensively with the urban area as a whole. This subregional planning is still a major focus of metropolitan-area work programs. Planning methods used at the subregional level differ from those at broader levels of analysis. Large-scale comprehensive inventories of total urban area travel movements were needed in the 1950s and 1960s because forecasts were heavily dependent on trend analysis or factoring up an existing travel pattern. As mathematical models calibrated on these existing data bases replaced real data in the late 1960s and early 1970s, smaller trip samples could be used to develop acceptable trip data. By mid-decade, disaggregate, targeted sample data tied to travel behavior could substitute for uniform sample data. A major need emerged to provide updated inputs to the models as well as to verify the stability of the parameters used in the models themselves. Census journey-to-work data can be used as a data base to meet these needs.

New planning issues have emerged at these finer scales of analysis, including private-sector (developer) provision of new infrastructure, traffic management of peak-hour congestion, parking, access to transit, and the provision of ridesharing and exclusive travel ways for high-occupancy vehicles. The scale of planning has shifted from designing a system of facilities to improving existing routes and services with funding from a variety of sources, including the private sector. In many areas it has also become a question of which transit routes within the urban area should be terminated and how ridesharing can be encouraged, not one of expanding transit service.

Comparison of the 1980 journey-to-work data with that of prior decades has established clearly that travel patterns are more diffuse than ever before. Suburban development is outpacing growth in older central areas many times over, and exurban and intrasuburban travel now dominate urban areas. By 1990 this growth will blur urban area boundaries as regions merge together. Multinucleated areas such as the Baltimore-Washington region will create new patterns of commuting and strain the capacity of existing suburban and rural transportation facilities.

Can the planning needs of these regions be met by relying on a one-shot small sample survey of commuting habits? Are the data provided by the census

journey-to-work survey useful in addressing these issues? I believe the answer is a qualified yes based on my review of weighing the assets and comparing them with the options available.

The foremost asset of the census journey-to-work data is their comprehensiveness. The information covers the entire urban area, even biregional areas such as the Baltimore-Washington region. It provides data on commuting from exurban areas. It has proven useful in a variety of ways. It provides control totals, socioeconomic data such as vehicle ownership, as well as modal data including vehicle occupancy. It is regarded as an independent, unbiased source at the local, state, and national levels. Together with other census data it forms the basis for making forecasts of small-area household and employment growth and change that drive our travel demand models.

The decennial census is a marvelous data collection service. Collecting the data is three-quarters of the battle. Relatively minor additions to content can provide the additional data needed. This is not to say that data on work travel are all that is needed. MPOs and others will have to supplement census data to cover nonwork travel and to keep travel patterns up to date. This will require small-scale continuing surveys and site-specific studies in urban areas to add this information.

Certain additional data are needed in order to make the data base more relevant to current planning issues. These include information on the leaving and arriving time for the work trip (temporal distributions) and, most importantly, whether a work trip to the "usual" work location was made yesterday and all the modes of travel used (as opposed to the usual mode).

Despite their shortcomings, the census journey-to-work data are a valuable asset for transportation planning. Although changes need to be made in 1990 to improve turnaround time and reliability, planning in the 1990s will require the kind of comprehensive information provided by this type of survey.

Transit agencies would also be well served by a question asking whether any household member used transit yesterday for a nonwork transit trip. This latter item would complete the picture of transit use in a region and enable the MPO and transit authority to develop relationships that would be extremely useful to compare and forecast total transit demand. Above all, user-based geography is essential if the data are to be relevant to needs, and the data should be made available to the states and MPOs as soon as possible.

George E. Hall:

I would like to take a somewhat different perspective. It seems to me that the data on journey to work and ownership of automobiles and so forth is of course extremely useful information for transportation planners, but it is also useful information for other people. There is a great deal of information in the UTPP that would be useful for marketers, other kinds of planners, and the like. It seems to me that if we begin to look at the questions on the journey to work and the other transportation questions from a different perspective, it would be useful not only for the other people out there--the commercial marketers, the planners, and those in other areas--but it would also be useful for the transportation people, because as you begin to build a constituency for those data and for other uses for those data, the demand will increase.

I am glad that I don't have the responsibility for the next comment I am going to make, but as demand begins to increase, the Census Bureau begins to fold these kinds of things into their ongoing programs, and I think that would be extremely valuable. You would not be getting a free good, but you would be moving toward getting information as a regular census product without its being