ON THE COMING TRANSFORMATION OF TRAVEL

Organized by the Federal Highway Administration, the New York State Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and the USDOT Volpe National Transportation Systems Center
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June 2006

To the Transportation Community:

A rapidly aging population pyramid, steadily improving vehicle technology and uncertainty about the stability and cost of petroleum supplies are but the beginning of the list of factors changing the face of travel in the United States. Add in rapid population growth in many metropolitan areas (and economic stagnation in others), climate change concerns, emerging methods for financing transportation improvements, and the economic impacts of globalization and you have a recipe for a very different environment for metropolitan planning over the next thirty to fifty years from the one in which our planning institutions were established.

Academicians, researchers, public policy advocates and private sector entrepreneurs typically live, move and think outside the “box” of the institutional mindset of state departments of transportation and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). For this reason, the transportation community reached out to these big thinkers to help articulate expectations for the future and to confront the planning profession with the risks and opportunities that will be present over the coming generation. The material in the following pages represents the findings and recommendations from these thinkers to practitioners.

Is this just an exercise in abstract conjecture? Hardly. Not a day goes by without the public and private sectors taking actions that establish long-lived land use and transportation frameworks. As practitioners, we can sleep at least a little more comfortably at the end of the day if we can say that our actions derived from an informed and intelligent perspective on what we can anticipate, what we cannot forecast and what we might possibly influence about the future.

John P. Poorman
Colloquy project chair
Staff Director, Capital District Transportation Committee, Albany NY
Chairman, New York State Metropolitan Planning Organizations
OVERVIEW

The Colloquy project was created to help planning practitioners make decisions regarding highway, transit, intermodal and intercity transportation facilities—decisions that will have impacts on the environment, economy, land form and community well-being lasting for generations. The project’s objective is to integrate the perspectives of experts in various fields and generate a set of expectations and recommendations that describes the inevitable identifies the avoidable, and puts perspective on the unknowable.

The project centerpiece was a unique event. From June 1 to 3, 2015 more than three dozen leading thinkers and researchers in economics, demographics, technology, public policy and the environment gathered in Rensselaer, New York—not for a series of presentations, but for structured discussions. While there were no MPO staff or state DOT representatives contributing to the Colloquy discussions, the critical objective was to produce recommendations for metropolitan planning. So, the Colloquy products are to be seen as recommendations to practitioners not from practitioners to an extent. They are a set of outside-looking-in recommendations. The participants were from a number of disciplines and their positions on critical issues both converge and diverge. It is a testimony to their knowledge and good will, and to the skill of the facilitators, that such a broad set of perspectives on an enormous set of issues could be synthesized into concise statements that resonated with the participants.

The Colloquy project was initially organized by the New York State Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (NYSMPO), a voluntary partnership of thirteen transportation planning agencies covering metropolitan areas with a total population of 37,000,000. The financial commitment of the NYSMPO was matched by the Federal Highway Administration’s Office of Planning. The FHWA arranged for the technical participation of the US DOT’s Volpe National Transportation Systems Center.

As part of the preparation for the June Colloquy event, the Volpe-Center prepared a focused synthesis of leading thought and research on each of its five broad areas where long-term trends are expected to have significant consequences for travel demand: demographics, public policy, urban land use, technology, and economics. The white papers are not intended to be exhaustive; other areas of inquiry, other trends, and other perspectives certainly exist. They were developed for participants, as a starting point for discussion. Each paper includes a list of recommended readings.

The first product of the Colloquy event is a series of statements of generally held expectations for long-term developments in five areas: demographics, technology, public policy, urban land use, and economics. From one perspective, there are few surprises in the generally held expectations for the future. Conditions of continued immigration, population growth, technological change, and constrained infrastructure are all confirmed. Yet the emphasis on uncertainty and on the breadth and scale of the issues facing metropolitan areas should not be discounted. Confirmation of the need to embrace uncertainty can be seen just in the events since the June event (e.g., Hurricane Katrina). A central element of the expectations is the assessment that transportation is becoming a knowledge-based commodity, and that we should plan for a greater private sector role in the past. Most observers of the transportation planning process agree that this is a time of transition for MPOs, and that demands on these organizations are not only changing, but increasing.

The second Colloquy product is a series of recommendations for MPOs, based in part on the statements of long-term expectations developed by participants in the June event. These recommendations are offered to MPOs as a potential roadmap to maximize their relevance and meaningful impact, at the same time that they work to make sense of and respond to federal requirements.

These products are presented in the following pages.

ORGANIZATION AND PROCESS

Organizers

New York State Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (NYSMPO): The NYSMPO is a voluntary coalition of the state’s 13 MPOs working together toward common goals. It is comprised of a diverse group of MPOs, representing very large, urban areas like New York City as well as small, urban areas such as Bingham and Glen Falls. By identifying common interests and needs, the NYSMPOs work on transportation-related planning and research initiatives to help member MPOs provide top-quality transportation planning expertise to the public throughout the state.

U.S. Department of Transportation Volpe National Transportation Systems Center: The Volpe National Transportation Systems Center is located in Cambridge, MA and operates under the policy guidance of the U.S. Secretary of Transportation and the Administrator of the Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA).

Federal Highway Administration Office of Planning, Environment and Realty (HEP): The Office of Planning, Environment and Realty serves as FHWA’s advocate and national leader for environmental protection and enhancement, comprehensive intermodal and multi-modal transportation planning, and for fair and prudent acquisition and management of real property. Transportation decisions need to be made in an environmentally sensitive way, using a comprehensive planning process that includes the public and considers land use, development, safety, and security. Transportation planners undertake a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of the potential impact of transportation plans and programs while addressing the aspirations and concerns of the society served by these plans and programs. Planners examine past, present, and prospective trends and issues associated with the demand for the movement of people, goods, and information at local, rural, tribal, metropolitan, statewide, national, and international levels.

THE PROJECT CENTERPIECE WAS A UNIQUE EVENT...
MORE THAN THREE DOZEN LEADING THINKERS AND RESEARCHERS IN ECONOMICS, DEMOGRAPHICS, TECHNOLOGY, PUBLIC POLICY & THE ENVIRONMENT GATHERED IN RENSSELAERVILLE, NEW YORK—NOT FOR A SERIES OF PREsentATIONS, BUT FOR STRUCTURED DISCUSSIONS.

The Volpe Center provides research, analysis, and systems capability on a fee-for-service basis for all modes of U.S. DOT, and other Federal, State and local agencies. In addition to a number of national entities. The Center fosters innovation and develops integrated systems approaches to crosscutting interagency and intermodal transportation issues of importance to the nation. Government, industry, and academia recognize the Center as a focal point for the assimilation, generation, and interchange of knowledge of national and international transportation and logistics systems. Increasingly, the Volpe Center is requested to apply its unique intermodal perspective to anticipate transportation and logistics issues, to identify needs, and to serve as a bridge between public and private sectors.
In some areas, the transportation system will offer consumers a new travel experience, providing a potential dichotomy between high service at a price and low quality on general purpose lanes or facilities.

-4. Immigration is expected to remain substantial due to the aging of the population pyramid of recent Americans and the needs of the economy for younger workers, professionals, and entrepreneurs.

To share their perspectives on particular subjects, the conference had an individual knowledge and experience exchange. This required time for participants' points of view to be aired.

Third, the approach focused on the small group and open discussion to articulate solutions and discuss subjects and select alternative perspectives.

Fourth, the approach envisioned the greatest benefit of the overall exercise as the weaving together of threads from various subjects into an articulation of how various factors can be expected to interact. The use of a retreat center for this exercise was intentional: multiple venues were provided for casual discussion of topics outside the structured sessions. It is hoped that the time spent by participants was personally satisfying and intellectually stimulating as well as productive.

Products: Day One

Generally Held Expectations

-3. A growing population will produce economic activity and transportation demand that will put substantial pressures on the transportation system in certain growth states and metropolitan areas, at points of entry and along trade corridors. The desire for mobility will remain strong and fueled by expected income growth. While the amount of further increases in per capita personal travel may be debatable, the expectation of increased aggregate travel demand—nationwide and across the entire experience and population growth—still is not.

-2. In rapidly growing areas with development constraints (limits to developable land, water, etc.), urban expansion will be accompanied by infill development, and will likely result in higher overall urban density.

-3. The current diversity of household forms, lifestyles, and changing nature of work will emphasize the need for a more flexible transportation system than that designed for traditional 9 to 5 work travel. The need for flexibility, travel choices that are accessible and sensitive to an individual's or household's schedule requirements will compound the challenges of designing a transportation system with effective non-auto travel options.

-4. Immigration is expected to remain substantial due to the aging of the population pyramid of recent Americans and the needs of the economy for younger workers, professionals, and entrepreneurs.

Transportation patterns of immigrants quickly reach patterns similar to those of other residents with comparable incomes. However, certain metropolitan areas are expected to continue to experience high levels of immigration of low-income workers. In these metropolitan areas, the trend needs of the new immigrants in their first few years of residency will continue to constitute a significant portion of overall demand for transit services.

-5. Decrease in settlement patterns and jobs will continue to contribute to spatial mismatching between the economy and in many urban areas. Increasing polarization of the labor force composition (between skilled/unskilled, on hand and low-wage service workers) on the one hand and the regional jobs—housing balance—on the other will exacerbate the regional jobs—housing balance and access transportation concerns for lower wage workers.

-6. An increasing proportion of the population will be older and old and also active, which will result in both more older drivers and a growing need for transportation system flexibility to meet the needs of the elderly who needs to rely increasingly on alternative modes. This will also increase the need for attention to safety. The need to improve transportation options to better accommodate the needs of seniors will be greatest in the least connected parts of communities that retain or attract large numbers of retirees.

Economics

-1. Use of pricing strategies will increase, with acceptance varying with the type of product, degree of congestion, type of road (new vs. existing facilities). Pricing will help mitigate and manage, but not eliminate congestion. The degree of penetration of pricing for system management and the level of public support for the use of pricing for social or environmental goals (such as transit support) will depend on the level of public support for such policies in certain areas. In some areas the transportation system will offer consumers the option of paying a premium for higher quality service, such as a choice between general and congestion-priced highway lanes. This will create a new travel and market phenomenon, providing a potential dichotomy between high service at a price (at a premium) and low quality (on general purpose lanes or facilities).

-2. There will be a growing role of the private sector in the design, development, operation, and maintenance of all modes. A division of private sector and public sector responsibilities, and the trends toward increased involvement of private sector in public transportation are expected to increase.

-3. Continued growth in the consumer economy, globalization of the supply chain, and a continued shift of manufacturing to lower-wage nations will impact freight transportation. Given these trends, it will be important for the freight transportation community to continue, especially for international and high-value cargoes, all of which is sensitive to quality, reliability and predictability. Economic growth will drive the push for increased efficiencies in freight logistics across all modes. Truck traffic will increasingly compete with auto travel for scarce highway capacity, and rail and waterborne freight networks will become increasingly attractive alternatives to truck movements.

-4. Emerging economies and new world powers will have an increasing influence on the US economic position, will ensure international economic interdependence and will increase international competition for scarce resources such as petroleum.

Public Policy

-1. The treatment of global climate change issues may emerge as a significant factor influencing transportation policies, perhaps as well as other aspects of the economy and society with their own impacts on travel.

-2. National, regional, and state policy makers may be more inclined to support strategies that offer significant benefits and are consistent with the goals of reducing our dependence on foreign oil. Transportation policies that encourage the use of fuel-efficient vehicles, alternative fuels, and public transportation may become more prominent in the political arena.

-3. The real cost of fuel, as well as the volatility of supply, is likely to increase. However, similar expectations in the past have been proven wrong.

-4. The continued shift in the US economic base away from manufacturing to service/communications/information is significant and will lead to agglomeration and dispersion, which could be very beneficial to the country. However, the current trend may not continue.

Technology

-1. Energy supply and climate change issues will stimulate the development of new transportation systems, which will affect transportation demand. The potential for such systems will allow for more efficient and effective use of energy. The potential for such systems will allow for more efficient and effective use of energy.

-2. There will be a major increase in new, more fuel-efficient vehicles, which will lead to a decrease in overall fuel consumption. However, the potential for such systems will allow for more efficient and effective use of energy.

-3. The use of alternative fuels, such as natural gas, ethanol, and biofuels, will increase, which will reduce the dependence on foreign oil. However, the potential for such systems will allow for more efficient and effective use of energy.

-4. The potential for such systems will allow for more efficient and effective use of energy.
Circumstances and Events That Would Undermine the Assumptions In the Generally-Held Expectations

**Climate change**
Substantial public and political sentiment could reduce the support for immigration and the commitment to environmental change.

**Circumstances and Events**
- Adverse economic conditions
- Changes in political leadership
- Health crises

**Findings and Recommendations for Metropolitan Planning**

**Introduction**
Decisions in transportation planning have great costs and effects on the community. While transportation planning objectives initially focused on the transportation infrastructure, the importance of transportation planning has increased significantly. This has led to steady and cumulative growth in the range of concerns considered at the transportation planning talks—safety, environmental, policy, and social equity. The colloborasy was specifically focused on the community’s current and comprehensive understanding of future travel behavior to plan the more efficient, better, and safer for the community. The colloborasy was specifically focused on the community’s current and comprehensive understanding of future travel behavior to plan the more efficient, better, and safer for the community.

**Findings**
The planning of the metropolitan services emerging from the colloborasy’s discussion is that MPOs can and should take a leading role in their communities for the benefit of the community and the environment. The MPOs can and should take a leading role in their communities for the benefit of the community and the environment. The MPOs can and should take a leading role in their communities for the benefit of the community and the environment.

**Recommendations**
- The need for more comprehensive and more comprehensive understanding of future travel behavior to plan the more efficient, better, and safer for the community.
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**New technologies**
Technology is shown to provide a reality to the assumption that new communication or transportation technology to emerge in the next 50 years will significantly change the dynamics of the current economic system. Transportation specifically experienced a number of innovative transportation technologies in the 1990s and 2000s, it is not unreasonable to suggest that another such change will occur over the next quarter-century to half-century.

**Public policy**
Major public initiatives have proceeded nearly all of the significant transportation system developments in the United States. It is worth noting that a public initiative—beyond those currently listed in the generally-held expectations—may emerge at the federal or state level to achieve a significant change in the form and extent of transportation facilities or services.

**FINDINGS**

**Metropolitan Planning Risks and Opportunities**

- There are significant risks associated with metropolitan planning processes. The presence of cooperative transportation decision-making processes provides a unique opportunity in every metropolitan area for comprehensive assessments of system needs and alternatives. It also provides for public accountability. Failure to successfully engage in meaningful, informed decision-making on issues ranging from urban form to the availability of modal alternatives exposes the metropolitan area to risks of significant inefficiencies and inequities which can be expected to be unappreciated by future users, both those foreseen and unforeseen. MPOs must be leaders in the areas of form, funding, and policy.

- These risks are greatest in areas experiencing rapid growth. One theme emerging from the colloborasy’s exploration of thirty-to-forty futures is a particular concern for areas experiencing high growth. Participants state that the nation is in a “moment of a large order of magnitude” that demands a reevaluation of how planning is done. In growth areas, fundamental questions about transportation system design and operation, modal decoupling, urban form, sustainability and distribution of benefits and burdens—about the ability and wisdom of public policy to shape the outcome—are needed immediately. MPOs in these areas face the greatest risks also enjoy the greatest opportunities for positive influence. The ability for the MPO to engage in region-shaping decisions is less present in established, slow-growth and no-growth areas and thus the need is less urgent.

- Federal statutory planning requirements are a mixed blessing. Participants express appreciation for the long-standing federal requirement for a comprehensive metropolitan transportation planning process. In the absence of the federal requirement, MPOs would have fewer resources to devote to the public process, and in a context in which transportation is a knowledge-based activity. Another theme woven throughout the recommendations is that an emerging transportation environment poses a particular challenge to fast-growing regions.

In short, colloborasy participants believe that many transportation and related MPO activities can be successfully accomplished only with effective regional planning and inter-jurisdictional coordination. Regions that develop effective MPOs can significantly improve the efficiency of transport and land use systems, and reduce both direct costs to businesses and consumers and indirect costs to society and the environment. The MPOs can and should take a leading role in their communities for the benefit of the community and the environment. The MPOs can and should take a leading role in their communities for the benefit of the community and the environment. The MPOs can and should take a leading role in their communities for the benefit of the community and the environment.

There are also significant opportunities associated with metropolitan planning processes. The presence of cooperative transportation decision-making processes provides a unique opportunity in every metropolitan area for comprehensive assessments of system needs and alternatives. It also provides for public accountability. Failure to successfully engage in meaningful, informed decision-making on issues ranging from urban form to the availability of modal alternatives exposes the metropolitan area to risks of significant inefficiencies and inequities which can be expected to be unappreciated by future users, both those foreseen and unforeseen. MPOs must be leaders in the areas of form, funding, and policy.

**THE ARE THERE SUCCESSFUL MPOs**

**In A RANGE OF SETTINGS. THE CHARACTERISTICS COMMON TO THE MOST SUCCESSFUL MPOs ARE ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP, FLEXIBILITY, CREDIBILITY, AND RELEVANCE IN SUBJECTS AND ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE REQUIRED FEDERAL PROCESS.**

**Planning**
Planning is typically not provided at a level appropriate to the scale of issues. Participants acknowledge that the ratio of funding for metropolitan transportation planning to the funding provided for project development or construction is very small. MPO staffs ranging from a few people in the smallest areas to a few dozen in the largest regions are hard-pressed to address the overwhelming set of complex issues. Again, this gap is most pronounced in rapidly-growth regions.
TO A CERTAIN DEGREE, THE “ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM” DURING THE COLLOQUIY—THAT IS, THE CONDITION THAT IS BOTH SUBSTANTIAL AND ALSO BEING IGNORED—is THE STATE OF THE CURRENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM, BOTH HIGHWAY SYSTEMS AND TRANSIT SYSTEMS ARE FALLING SHORT OF PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS.

FINDINGS

- At the same time, there are successful MPOs in a range of settings. The characteristics of successful MPOs include leadership, credibility and relevance in subjects and activities outside the federal process. In the colloquy paper discussion on the MPO process and in individual breakout sessions, participants pointed to many cases in which an MPO has been able to overcome obstacles and fulfill the promise of the MPO concept – providing greater connectivity and engaging stakeholders and ensuring successful implementation agreements. The term “entrepreneurial” was repeatedly used to describe the ability of successful MPOs (often because of staff leadership) to be prepared for and seize the correct timing for initiatives that recognize with MPO members and other stakeholders in the community. The new initiatives are consistent with but not required by federal law or regulation.

- MPO stature within the local community is directly related to effectiveness of working relationships between the MPO staff and MPO participants. Given that the MPO staff size is comparable to the “tail” on the larger “log” of state and local governments and transportation authorities, strong working relationships between the MPO and its partners are inherent in successful planning processes. Only when the partners share ownership of the MPO process and seek value added through the process can the MPO expect to be seen as a vital decision-making forum distinct from the individual member agencies and able to go beyond the institutional constraints of those agencies. When successful, MPOs enjoy broad local support.

- High turnover rates within MPO boards and staff jeopardize policy continuity and implementation. As an instrument for state and federal officials and appointed officials of member agencies, members’ tenure on an MPO board is typically brief. The same can be said for MPOs in which pay scales or job frustration perpetuates constant staff turnover. MPOs that maintain policy continuity and build credibility over time are only those that are able to instill a constructive institutional culture that retains experienced staff and personnel through the changing of the political guard.

- Regarding potential shocks to the system identified in the colloquy, MPOs cannot be easily designed to respond to possible short-term shock situations (bridges failing, energy supply interruptions). They can work to build a multi-layered transportation system that could adapt to short-term shocks and long-term trends. The colloquy discussion articulated a wide range of “tools” that could be used in this regard. Participants express recognition that emergency circumstances generate their own set of public and private response mechanisms, and that the MPO is not necessarily the place to expect emergency evacuation plans. It builds both the basic layer of building blocks transit systems, ITS services, etc.) and communications channels facilitate both public and private partners and longer-term system modifications to deal with unexpected, long-lasting impacts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Entrepreneurial Leadership, an Enhanced Knowledge Base and a Revised Planning Approach

Entrepreneurial Leadership

- This characteristic of successful MPOs must be nurtured in other MPOs. Structured processes are required, such as peer-to-peer exchanges, best practice documentation, monitoring and formal training of staff, staff leadership and elected officials. This may build on the current “Metropolitan Capacity Building Program” but also requires new and sophisticated approaches that communicate in more terms of successful institutional culture than in terms of institutional rhetoric, more in terms of entrepreneurial risk taking than in terms of staff administration. The need is for more MPOs that are able to tailor local technical and policy activity to address emerging issues in a balanced and sound way, derive sound decisions from past successes. This type of MPO institutional culture is seen as critical to success in today’s hyper-speed and uncertain environment suggested in the colloquy.

- MPO directors need to spend a considerable amount of time and effort on cultivating relationships with local leaders, establishing effective positions at relevant agencies in the region. This particular effort is required because of the critical need to maintain MPO relevance in a constantly changing environment. Regular contact and personal credibility offer entries into the processes of members and stakeholders and also increases commitment to the MPO process on the part of these individuals.

- MPOs must take a lead in the creation and visualization of the necessary changes in the decision-making process. Participants state that a shared, dynamic regional vision is a more effective instrument of public policy than a traditional transportation facilities plan. “Visionary leadership” is identified as one of the greatest contributions the MPO institution can provide to the transportation system. Visionary leadership allows short-term, local decisions to be consistent with long-term, strategic goals. Such leadership brings both the institutional culture called for in the recommendation. In other words, recognizing the very significant contribution of new, non-operational actions to both produce benefits and generate greater knowledge of travel dynamics, in turn, improves the MPO perspective on long-range decisions.

Enhanced Knowledge Base

- MPOs need to make a worthwhile investment in data. Participants are quite clear that MPOs need to know both the MPO’s awareness of issues and its successful engagement with them. The subject matter of the colloquy was rich in patterns of freight movement to relationships with market development and public health. The recommended MPO involvement in operations (at the short-term end of the spectrum) and the likely increasing role of MPOs in a more comprehensive management of freight (at the long-term end of the spectrum) both come with substantial data needs, as does an emphasis on performance monitoring and outcome-based planning. Participants termed the MPO’s need for re-examine existing data collection efforts and consider new initiatives to ensure that the collection at a higher scale than at present.

- MPOs must foster mechanisms to maintain a strong knowledge base within the decision-making structure, including the stakeholder base. At a minimum, there must be tools and techniques in each MPO to effectively orient new policy members and their technical representatives to the general purpose and specific institutional culture and policy set of the MPO. The greatest success may be found in MPOs that have a strong set of adopted policies that allow the MPO to maintain primacy consistently and predictably. Colloquy participants also recognize the need for a strong, capable staff and an informed stakeholder population (including private transportation and land use planners, engineers, designers and developers). Continued professional development of all parties is required to maintain a strong knowledge base.

- Training in conscious-building and inclusive visioning skills is critical to MPO effectiveness. The central role envisioned by participants for the MPO in leading regional improvements requires substantial skills in this area. Training in group dynamics, process design, MPO resolution and conflict resolution by examining the difficult individuals are all called for in order to be fully successful. Additionally, visioning and “back-casting” are relatively new approaches without a solid base of literature. "how's and 'how not's", work is required in this area.

- Financial mechanisms, including innovative public-private arrangements, represent a rapidly-emerging arena of need for enhanced MPO skills. A second particular skill cited by participants is in the area of complex financial mechanisms. Currently and perhaps for a degree greater in coming years, non-traditional financing will be used to facilitate highway and transit capital construction and to support operations. These new mechanisms include leasing arrangements, mitigation fees, variable tolling approaches, non-compete clauses, right-of-way donations and others. MPO participants, particularly MPO staff, must be conversant in this language or risk either miss the opportunities for transportation system funding or having such explorations occur outside the comprehensive planning context of the MPO forum.

- Skills in consultant management must be held by MPOs, who are now being solicited by the participants relate to consultant management. Most MPOs rely on planning consultants for a number of services, including financial strategies, such as model development and calibration, corridor analyses, or all analyses for new transit starts. Each of these kinds of activities is important to the analysis of capital projects for public policy. Participants cite a need for strong management to ensure development of clear objectives of services and timely, cost-effective delivery of useful products. This is especially important if the private sector assumes a greater role in system ownership and operation. A corollary to this recommendation is that the consultant community must be nurtured just like the MPO staff in its understanding of changing environment, its skills in visioning and conflict resolution.

- MPOs must monitor customer/consumer needs and seek effective approaches to deal with what is seen as important at the “street level” – congestion, reliability, availability of transit options. Balancing the need for broad long-term visioning, participants cite the need for MPO activities to be grounded in issues most pertinent to residents’ daily lives. Precipitation with long-range setment patterns must be accompanied with a concern for daily congestion, with attention to reducing the frequency and magnitude of transportation actions to occur. Highway programs to maintain. The elephant in the room” during the colloquy was the recognition by participants that is both substantial and also being ignored – is the state of the current transportation system. Both highway systems (with operating resources typically inadequate to provide a competitive alternative to the auto) are falling short of public expectations. Continuous monitoring of public attitudes, of public perceptions of the effectiveness of implemented actions, and of public responses to implemented actions are all essential elements of a successful MPO knowledge base and effective use of outcome-based performance indicators. Participants stressed the need to also monitor and consider the public’s relative priorities and willingness to make trade-offs among such factors as congestion relief, road rage, availability of useful information, quality of life, quality of the trip (quality of daily travel for all vs. peak expressway travel), public transportation, and compliance with speed limits, walkability and quality of economic development/Smart growth in the article on “smart growth” as an opportunity. An exclusive emphasis on highway-level of service service in this exploration or occurring outside the comprehensive planning context of the MPO appears to accurately reflect the complex priority set of the public.
RECOMMENDATIONS

A Revised Planning Approach

1. The MPO planning perspective must not be only broadened (in scope) but also strengthened (in planning horizon). The range of nontraditional subjects that are critical and objective must be broadened to include social needs (e.g., poverty, crime, public health, environmental sustainability, intensity freight and passenger movement, new transportation technologies, and other issues). The implications of this broadened perspective, articulated in the colloquy, is the need to focus more attention than traditionally reflected in the twenty-year MPO long-range planning process.

2. If, in the planning program, MPOs must focus policy discussions on those areas that can have the greatest potential impact on metropolitan travel. The discussions of future trends on travel. The discussions of future trends often return to the observation that some of the driving forces of society and the economy (indeed, some of the most significant) such as global climate change and international terrorism, are exogenous to metropolitan transportation planning. The conclusion is that MPOs must take a more active role in identifying and addressing these exogenous factors. This broader perspective requires an understanding of the regional system’s economy (from site design to regional settlement patterns) and transportation system design (the methods of service delivery to capital investments). The latter include vehicle technology, price and availability of fuel, national policies regarding immigration, social patterns regarding family size, and other national or global trends and events. An MPO can seek success by carefully “growing” the list of items over which it has influence—into intensity freight transportation or interstate corridor management, for example—while constantly reflecting on the effectiveness of local decisions in light of global conditions. Closer cooperation with and understanding of state and local planning efforts is also warranted.

3. To that end, visioning efforts should also incorporate scenario development, as a means of incorporating the concept of uncertainty. Traditional MPO exercises settle on a certain set of future population, employment, household, and vehicle ownership forecasts before evaluating alternative transportation system designs. Typically, future land use patterns are a given before the transportation analysis begins. Further, the wide range of items that are inherently exogenous to the MPO process are nearly universally excluded from consideration in current MPO planning. Colloquy participants recommend that scenario development be part of regional visioning exercises and that the scenarios engage not only in the exchange between transportation system designs and alternative economic growth scenarios but also in the flexibility of the transportation / land use system to respond to a variety of outcomes in the exogenous variables.

4. A changing environment calls for a more thorough incorporation of technology in planning activities and in resulting plans. Participants at the colloquy indicate that technology in general and ITS in particular is at the center of the future of travel and should be a singular attraction for transportation planners. This recommendation calls for MPO staffs to become more knowledgeable about the rapid changes occurring in information technology, goods movement technology, and vehicle-highway technology. The feasibility of the flexible transportation / land use system can be tested against the outcomes by the exogenous variables.

5. Education is a critical component of effective transportation land use planning and MPOs must find their role in the educational process. Participants state that public consciousness of transportation and its relationship to the environment and society is weak. “Education at all levels needs to be enhanced—public education, higher education and job training at all different levels of focus and specificity” as transportation becomes a “knowledge-based system.” The MPO will need to play a critical role in this activity.

6. Effective planning requires a close connection between transport, planning, and MPOs must find their role in this process. Participants state that public consciousness of participation is the key to success in planning and project development processes. This calls for adoption across many more states and MPOs of early, NCEA-quality environmental analyses within the planning process that is evident in some locations today, along with greater accountability of designers to the MPO regarding project objectives, scope and cost.
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