U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
Administration**

Public Involvement for Transportation Decision-making

METROPLAN (LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS) "Pouring Water on Dry Ground"

September 1997

FORWARD

One way to find out how to use public involvement techniques effectively is to learn from the experiences of others. **METROPLAN (LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS): "Pouring Water on Dry Ground"** illustrates how a mid-sized metropolitan planning organization used varied public involvement techniques to begin public involvement early in long range transportation planning. It is one of three separate case studies of public involvement. The others are:

- **SOUTH SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT/LA LINEA DEL SUR**, proactive public involvement during project development in an area with large and diverse ethnic populations.
- **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AT OREGON DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**, a variety of public involvement experiences in both project development and statewide planning.

Copies of these case studies are available from:

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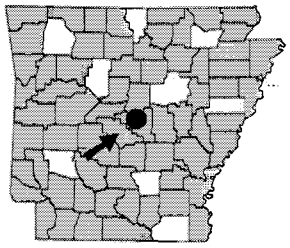
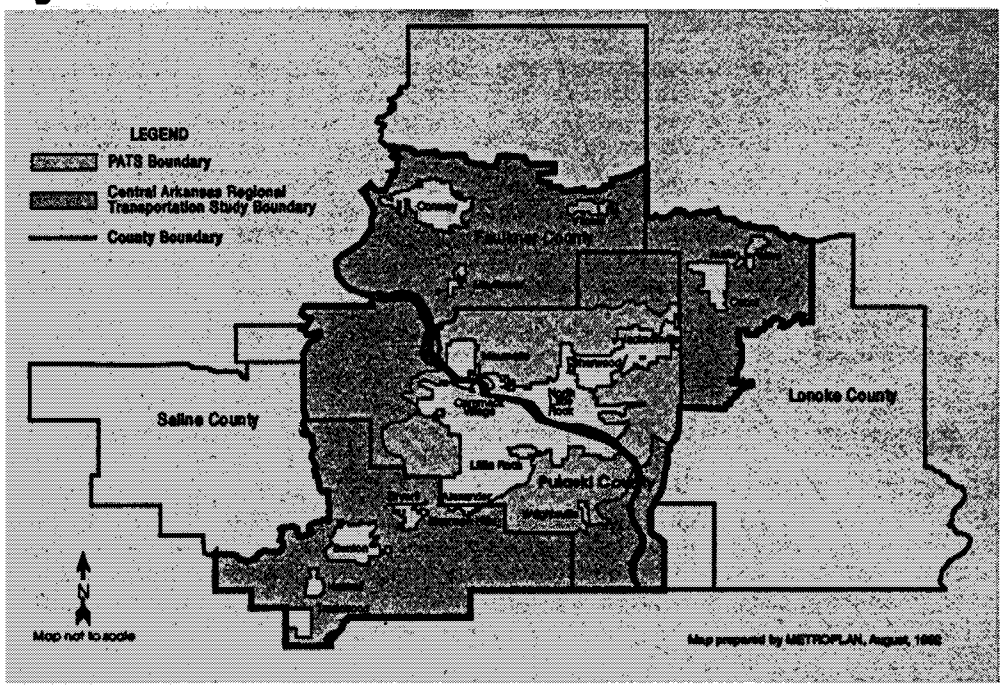
Case Study: METROPLAN (LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS) "Pouring water on dry ground"



Metroplan—the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for central Arkansas (Little Rock/North Little Rock Metropolitan Statistical Area)—developed a robust public involvement process to support its long-range planning process, known as Metro 2020. This process has carried over to implementation through transportation improvement program (TIP) development and major investment studies (MIS). The public involvement process has also been recognized as the catalyst to address development issues at a regional level. Participants—including elected leaders, agency professionals, and members of the community—almost universally hail Metroplan's efforts for the increased cooperation they have fostered on a number of regional issues. These efforts have been led by a relatively small, but energetic, staff that has gone the extra mile to keep the process going, Some highlights include:

Figure 1. CARTS area.



- ***A high level of commitment to participatory planning.*** This was demonstrated through use of a wide variety of techniques, a willingness to try new strategies when traditional ones failed, and, most importantly, an attitude of responsiveness. An emphasis on regional cooperation by elected leaders has conveyed the message that citizens' opinions are valued and that they will be reflected in Metroplan's decisions and their implementation.
- ***A visioning process*** that got people interested in the planning process, helped define goals and objectives, and spurred local jurisdictions to revise their land-use regulations and require builders to install sidewalks in their developments. The process used a visual surveying technique that was validated by public meetings and focus groups and then communicated through other innovative mechanisms. This process was followed by workshops to develop plan details.
- ***Numerous efforts to solicit participation in the TIP,*** including workshops to assist jurisdictions with the preparation of TIP project proposals. The workshops are intended to help smaller communities develop proposals that can compete with the proposals developed by State agencies and larger jurisdictions.
- ***Training for planning commissions.*** Many of the region's communities have no strong planning tradition. However, some leaders recognize that planning has intrinsic community benefits and can help them qualify for more funding from State and Federal sources.

The Central Arkansas Regional Transportation Study (CARTS) area (see **Figure 1**) represents the region over which Metroplan has jurisdiction. CARTS currently has a population of approximately 607,000 (1995 estimate) and is expected to grow to 662,000 in the year 2020. The CARTS area includes 4 counties and 17 cities. Little Rock is the Arkansas capital and business center, with a population of 175,000.

Players

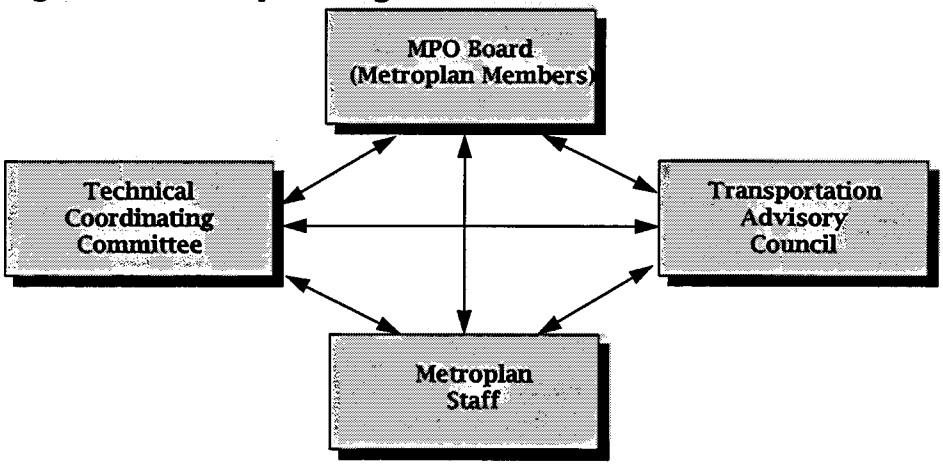
Following passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), Metroplan's jurisdiction expanded from 513 to 2,463 square kilometers (319 to 1,531

square miles).[1] The expansion placed a substantial burden on Metroplan to get to know and be known in these areas.

The Metroplan Board

The Metroplan Board now includes the chief elected official of each member jurisdiction—4 counties and 17 cities. The Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) and Central Arkansas Transit Authority (CATA) also have representation. The Board normally meets once a month, during business hours. Members of the public are welcome to attend these meetings, which are announced in the local media—mostly through legal notices. The Board has played a key role in setting the tone and by empowering its Transportation Advisory Council to take a leading role in the public involvement program. The Board's enthusiastic participation in public outreach events, including visual surveying sessions and Vision Week, has been essential for establishing the credibility of the public involvement process. More importantly, it has paid close attention to the insights harvested from this process as reflected by its decisions as a group and as individual elected officials in their own communities.

Figure 2. Metroplan organization.



Transportation Advisory Council

The Transportation Advisory Council (TAC) had primary responsibility for developing the Metro 2020 Long-range Plan. It continues to act as an advisory body and sounding board for Metroplan's planning and outreach activities. It is in the process of adopting a new set of bylaws and will meet at least every quarter. It will also be involved in the long-range plan update, which will begin in 1997.

The TAC, with 34 members, includes citizen representatives from member jurisdictions, as well as stakeholders, including business, environmental, bicycle, goods movement, and neighborhood groups. Shortly after it was formed, the TAC went on a Metroplan-sponsored field trip of the entire CARTS region. This gave each member a better understanding of development and land use in the region. The TAC appointed its own chair and designated subcommittees (with the Board's approval) for land use/ environment, roadways, and transit/ non-motorized transportation. Discussion on issues before the committee continues until all members are satisfied. While the TAC does not require total unanimity, issues that face substantial dissent are generally tabled until differences are worked out either at the table or through informal contacts. Four TAC members—the chair and subcommittee chairs—sit on the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), and two TCC members sit on the TAC. Four members also hold elected office at the local, county, or State level. This cross-fertilization brings community concerns to the attention of the TCC and adds technical expertise to the TAC. It also helped the TAC overcome initial skepticism of the technical representatives, who were concerned that decisions had a sound technical basis and reflected financial reality.

Technical Coordinating Committee

The TCC includes planning or engineering professionals from each jurisdiction, technical representatives from AHTD and CATA, and the four TAC representatives. A representative from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) sits in an ex officio capacity and offers guidance on compliance with Federal regulations and the state of the practice. This group has taken responsibility for overseeing the technical work for the long-range plan, development of the TIP, and review of the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). TCC members were probably the most wary about Metroplan's public involvement program. They were clearly concerned that they would be pushed into making "unwise" investments, or that they would get bogged down in ancillary social and environmental issues on projects. While they were right on the second point (they do have to work through environmental and community concerns about projects), their concerns about a spendthrift public were largely unfounded. The community understood that the long-range plan had to be fiscally constrained. Their focus on land use policies that encourage more compact development also will probably result in lower overall infrastructure costs.

Metro 2020 Long-range Transportation Plan

Metroplan initiated its public involvement program when it began work on the Metro 2020 Plan, employing a wide variety of approaches to involve the previously uninitiated in the process. This was a formidable task, since the pub-

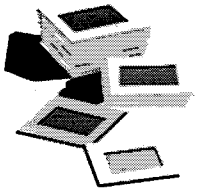
[1] Metroplan was previously responsible for the Pulaski Area Transportation Study, which covered a smaller area almost completely in Pulaski County.

lic had not recently been substantially involved in Metroplan's activities. Metroplan's planning director compared this process to ***"pouring water on dry ground."*** It took great effort to get people involved, but once the public's attention was captured, they persevered, followed the process to its conclusion, and continue to be involved in implementation.

Kick-off meetings and video

The long-range planning process was kicked off with a set of public meetings and presentations to introduce the newly reorganized Metroplan to the community and explain the upcoming planning process. The meetings were held throughout the CARTS region, and presentations were also made to interested community groups. The meetings were accompanied by a short video featuring a local television personality. The video explained the planning process as mandated by ISTEA, its importance to the maintenance and development of transportation in the region, and the emphasis on public involvement. It was delivered in a way that could be received and understood by people who were not yet familiar with planning issues. Planning jargon was avoided—or explained where its use was necessary. Viewers were encouraged to get involved by contacting their Metroplan Board or TAC representative, or by calling Metroplan at a number shown on the screen. The video was also shown on the local public access cable channel.

Vision surveying



The second step in the process involved a vision surveying technique that sought to identify the types of roadways, land use, and transportation that were most attractive and appropriate for different parts of the CARTS region. The survey was prepared and administered by a consultant contracted to assist in developing the plan. Three categories of communities were designated: rural areas and small cities, suburban areas and medium-sized cities, and large cities. Participants were shown a series of photographic slides of different types of roadways, residential and commercial development, and transportation systems in each of the three categories. Roadway options ranged from country roads with two lanes and no curbs to four- or six-lane divided highways. Residential development showed various types of low- and medium-density housing. Commercial options included conventional strip malls as well as neo-traditional shopping areas (commercial districts where pedestrian access is emphasized, stores front onto streets, and off-street parking is kept to the rear of the lot. A number of transit systems were shown, including buses and minibuses, light-rail transit (LRT), commuter rail, and water taxis. Participants then scored each image on a -10 to +10 scale. Images that were scored on the positive side were found to be attractive and appropriate for the designated setting. The images were accompanied by a 55-item questionnaire to establish the demographics of the sample as well as to explore some of the more complex transportation issues.

One session was also videotaped for public access cable. Home viewers were invited to score each image on a blank sheet of paper and send the results in to Metroplan. However, only about four people actually sent in responses from home.

This vision surveying technique was particularly attractive because it was a way to involve a large number of people at an early stage without demanding that they have a sophisticated technical background. For most participants, the survey represented their first involvement in a planning process. It was hoped that the survey would get them hooked and keep them coming back as the process progressed. It is now seen by the staff and many participants as the watershed event that put Metroplan in the mind's eye of the community.

Most of the images shown in the survey were taken from the CARTS area, although certain shots of transit systems and special types of land use were brought in from other regions. The survey was initially reviewed by the TAC, TCC, and Metroplan staff to ensure that the range of images shown was realistic and appropriate. A key concern was that expectations about possible options be kept at a realistic level. To this end, images were screened to ensure that they did not suggest the possibility of projects or development that might be attractive but were not physically or financially feasible.

In all, over 900 people participated in the survey at one of more than 30 sessions held throughout the CARTS region. Two thousand participants had been the goal, but the total attendance was still impressive. While the sample did not necessarily match CARTS' demographics or economic characteristics, each significant age, gender, economic, occupational, and racial group had at least five percent representation. Participants included children as young as 9 or 10, as well as retired people. One session was held at a senior citizens' center.

Metroplan contracted with a local marketing firm to help promote the survey. The sessions were heavily advertised with display ads in local print media. Metroplan representatives made over 40 appearances on local television and radio to promote the surveys and the planning process. They also pitched the survey to numerous local group meetings, and there was a significant effort to build participation by word-of-mouth. TAC members were asked to get the word out and encourage residents to participate. Several suburban papers and one statewide paper with primarily minority circulation also offered extensive press coverage. However, the Arkansas *Democrat-Gazette,* the major daily paper in Little Rock, has not given the process as much attention because the planning process had to compete with a range of other local, State, and national issues. This made the task of advertising the survey to city residents much more difficult. The print media ads

were supplemented by newsletters, posters, leaflets, and business card-sized schedules distributed throughout the area at libraries, shopping centers, and restaurants.

After the first few survey sessions, Metroplan noticed that it was not meeting its own goals for minority participation, particularly among African-Americans (the most significant minority). Metroplan sought to build a statistically valid sample of the racial, ethnic, income, gender, and age groups in the region. It reacted by scheduling additional sessions in minority communities to help increase participation. It also reached out to the Black Ministerial Alliance in hopes that the Alliance could assist in building interest among its congregations. Finally, African-American members of the TAC made a special effort to encourage participation from their communities. A meeting of local African-American leaders was held by one of the TAC members in an effort to drum up interest in the study. These efforts increased minority participation to approximately 10 percent, although it still did not meet the levels that Metroplan had hoped for. Part of the difficulty may be attributed to a lower level of press coverage in Little Rock, which is home to a substantial portion of the area's African-American population. Also, a number of largely unrelated local issues in Little Rock have competed with Metro 2020 for the public's attention.

The results of the vision survey were tabulated and analyzed to assist in establishing the goals and objectives for the Metro 2020 plan. Some of the preferences identified through the survey are shown in **Figure 3.**

Figure 3. VISION SURVEY PREFERENCES

Area	Preferences
Urban areas	▪ a desire to see ground-floor retail in office buildings and parking structures ▪ curbside parking and pedestrian amenities on city streets ▪ improved pedestrian and transit services, possibly including light rail ▪ multi-family dwellings and mixed-use buildings
Suburban & mid-sized cities	▪ improved sidewalks and pedestrian connections linking homes, recreation, and commercial areas ▪ emphasis on smaller lot sizes and multi-family houses in closer proximity to employment centers ▪ flexible transit options
Rural & small cities	▪ narrower streets with better edge definition ▪ small-lot residential pattern in centers and large lot residential pattern in fringe areas ▪ sidewalks in centers and bicycle networks to link development nodes

The overall theme was a preference for compact and efficient development that would require less infrastructure than would be needed if growth and development followed the trend. People clearly want communities that make homes, employment centers, and commercial and recreational areas accessible to pedestrians and cyclists and require shorter auto trips. Little Rock is recognized and accepted as the region's center, so there is strong support for linking it with the outlying communities. Many people expressed an interest in rail transit as a substitute for more highways, and the plan includes a provision for a major investment study to investigate transit options, including light and commuter rail. The technical experts of the transit and highway agencies are skeptical that the region can support fixed-guideway transit.

Validation

The survey results were validated using a series of public presentations and focus groups. The public presentations were made during a "Vision Week" in February 1994. Five meetings were held—in Little Rock and North Little Rock (both in Pulaski County), Benton (Saline County), Cabot (Lonoke County), and Conway (Faulkner County)—with over 150 people attending. These meetings were organized around 60-minute presentations of the survey results. Participants were asked for reactions to the survey during and after the meetings and were also invited to submit written comments to Metroplan. The agency received more than 90 comments.

The focus groups met to discuss the survey results and to better understand their implications. In all, five meetings were held—two in Pulaski County and one in each of the other three counties. The questionnaire had identified participants who were interested in continued involvement with the process and who were now invited to participate in the focus groups. The groups were designed to be geographically balanced and representative of minority, disabled, and low-income residents. Additional people who had not participated in the survey were recruited for the groups to provide balanced representation.

These groups were facilitated by a consultant and consisted of 8 to 10 people seated around a table. A facilitator established parameters and then opened free discussion. The focus groups generally confirmed the survey results. However, they also identified a number of important but subtle issues that had not previously surfaced, including the need for grade separation of road/ rail crossings, preservation of rail corridors for possible use by passenger service, and a desire for narrower residential streets. They also recommended that Metroplan continue to improve involvement by minority and low-income persons.

Communication of survey results

The results of the survey, Vision Week, and focus groups were summarized and presented to the general public in an eight-page insert in a Sunday newspaper with an estimated circulation of 225,000. The insert introduced Metroplan and the Metro 2020 planning process, then summarized the survey results, using photographs of both

positive and negative images and four-color production. One page explained the context of the survey results and how they related to seven goals for the plan.

The insert also urged people to get involved. A mail-back comment coupon asked people to offer impressions of the survey results. About 70 people commented in writing, over the phone, or by visiting the Metroplan office. The coupon also included a form for people to use to identify congested locations throughout the region. People were asked to explain both where and when the congestion occurs. The results were mapped and used to assist in assessing potential roadway improvement projects for the Metro 2020 plan as well as for TIP development.

Workshops

Workshops were set up for TAC subcommittees to address specific issues of the long-range plan, including bikeways, land use, transit, and goods movement. The meetings were open and were attended by both committee members and members of the public—though mostly by committee members and persons whom they invited. The workshops included up to 20 participants each. The bikeway meeting was set up around a conference table with maps that allowed participants to draw in projects they would like to see implemented. This process represented the next step in developing the community's vision for the long-range plan. All of the projects that emerged from these sessions were placed on the initial list of projects to be considered for the plan. At that point, these projects— along with other projects proposed by agencies or jurisdictions—were reviewed for technical and financial feasibility.[2]

The TAC subcommittees continued to work through the proposals as well as the larger thematic issues for the draft plan. At the same time, the TCC reviewed the travel demand study results and considered the technical merits of the proposed projects. The project list was narrowed to reflect the forecast funding constraints and balance maintenance of existing facilities with new capital projects. The two committees then collaborated with the Metroplan staff to prepare a draft plan for review by the public and the Board. Metroplan's public information officer, who has a journalism background, assisted in making the document more readable and accessible to the public at-large.

Presentation of draft plan

The completed draft was rolled out for public comment at seven hearings held in each of the CARTS counties. The meetings were held from 7:00 to 9:00 P.M. in buildings accessible to people with disabilities CATA also made its list of signers and its Braille translator available, although neither was required. Total attendance was 116, including 38 speakers. A 30-day comment period was extended for an additional month to allow the public to respond to substantial changes. The public was invited to comment orally during one of the public hearings (via telephone or FAX to the Metroplan offices) or in writing (using forms provided by Metroplan). Thirty-two written comments were received. The hearings were publicized in legal notices in the Arkansas *Democrat-Gazette* as well as suburban and minority newspapers. There were also a number of feature articles about the hearings and comment period.

In response to comments received during the initial comment phase, the Metroplan Board elected (in a vote that ran counter to the recommendations of the TAC) to make a substantial change to the draft plan, by proposing that the North Belt Freeway, a major highway project slated for completion beyond 2020, be completed within the horizon year. This decision reflected comments given during several hearings, over the phone, in writing, in newspaper editorials, and directly to board members by their constituents. The TAC had been concerned that there was not sufficient funding to complete the project. In the end, the State committed funds to the project's completion. The comment period was extended by 30 days to allow the public to react to and comment on this change. Comments on the plan and responses from Metroplan were included as an appendix in the final plan.

Implementation

Metroplan has two direct roles in implementing the Metro 2020 plan: developing and approving the TIP, and approving recommendations that come from major investment studies. The Metroplan Board is responsible for these approvals, with the advice of the TAC and TCC.

Metro 2020 also made a number of land-use recommendations that seek to steer growth and development in ways that enable the most efficient use of existing and planned infrastructure. The recommendations outlined a vision for what was hoped would be a more attractive and livable community. These issues have been particularly important to the citizen members on the TAC. However, the plan did not identify any enforcement measures, and Metroplan does not have any direct role in land-use planning. The only remaining avenue for implementation of the land-use elements has been for the staff and committee members to become missionaries spreading the word about land-use planning to interested communities and residents. They do so within the context of the TIP development process.

TIP development

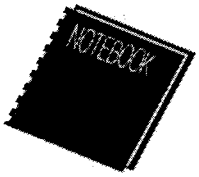
The transportation improvement program lists Federally and non-Federally funded transportation projects that will be initiated within three years. The projects are proposed by communities, transit providers, AHTD, and Metroplan

[2] The workshops also helped Metroplan maintain its creative momentum and keep people involved at a time when the process might have lost momentum due to delays in developing the travel forecasting model.

itself. Proposed projects are expected to offer regional-level benefits. Projects that will only have local benefits should be funded at the local level. The TIP is revised annually by Metroplan, with help from its TCC, TAC, and other participating agencies. According to Federal rules, the final list of projects must be constrained to include only those projects for which funding has been identified.

Metroplan and its TAC have developed a public involvement program for the TIP process that includes the following features:

- ***A manual for TIP project proposal development*** was written and disseminated to both public officials and interested private citizens. This has leveled the playing field by providing smaller jurisdictions with a better understanding of what they need to compete for TIP-funded projects.



- ***A pocket-sized transportation glossary and resource book*** was prepared and targeted at the interested, but non-technical, citizen.
- ***An outreach and education effort,*** including meetings and public notices, is undertaken each year at the beginning of the TIP development cycle.
- ***Legal notices include "plain English" explanations*** of the TIP and TIP development process. This provides non-technical citizens with a better understanding of proposals and their implications.
- The back page of the TIP has a ***reader feedback sheet*** that invites people to comment on the document and the process. All Metroplan documents now include this feature. Readers are invited to mail or FAX the sheet to Metroplan.
- ***The public is invited to make comments*** on proposed projects, the documents for which are made available at libraries and at municipal and county buildings.

In addition, Metroplan made a special effort to broaden the opportunity to propose TIP projects and to improve proposal quality, most notably with a workshop on TIP project proposal development for jurisdiction officials and private citizens.

Workshops for Jurisdictions

The TCC had observed that smaller jurisdictions were not producing well-prepared TIP proposals and that the proposals were not faring well in the evaluation. In response, Metroplan developed the "CARTS Policy and Procedures for Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Development." This document explains the procedure for developing an application and the criteria and procedures used by the TCC when reviewing applications. The document was reviewed by the TCC before it was distributed. This year, Metroplan also held two workshops, one during working hours and one during evening hours, to help local jurisdictions prepare quality TIP proposals. Elected officials, staff, and interested members of the public were encouraged to attend. Invitations were sent out to each jurisdiction. In many of the smaller communities, it is private citizens who take responsibility to develop proposals.

This workshop is particularly important for smaller and low-income jurisdictions, which may rely on volunteer members of planning commissions for proposal development. Lonoke County is relying on a group of Quorum Court (county legislature) members to develop one of its proposals. These people are elected officials who are generally at a disadvantage in terms of technical background and resources. At the same time, they compete for these transportation dollars with organizations that have full-time technical staff, like AHTD, CATA, and the larger cities. A key goal of the workshops is to develop a better understanding of how the TIP is used as an implementation tool of the Metro 2020 Plan.

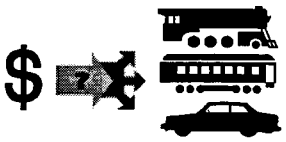
The workshops were attended by 50 people (technical people as well as members of the public) and are expected to result in fewer applications, each of which will be of better quality. A community that might have submitted six or seven proposals will now submit one or two focused proposals that have a better chance of succeeding.

TIP Proposal Critiques

As an additional educational tool, each TIP proposal that does not meet the criteria for inclusion is critiqued by the staff and TCC and then returned to the submitting jurisdiction. This critique allows applicants to improve areas where they were deficient and compete the following year. In some cases a proposal may have dealt with an important regional issue but was rejected because the proposal did not clearly establish the problem or proposed solution. In other cases a proposal may have dealt with a local issue that was ineligible for the TIP, but the critique clarified the requirements so that the jurisdiction was in a better position to identify eligible projects.

Major investment studies

While major investment studies are generally sponsored and administered by the AHTD, or by CATA if a transit MIS is undertaken (one investigating option for fixed-guideway transit is identified in the Metro 2020 Plan), the Metroplan Board must approve the recommended investment strategy for a project to move forward with Federal funds. The TCC and TAC may provide opinions on these recommendations to the Board for its consideration.

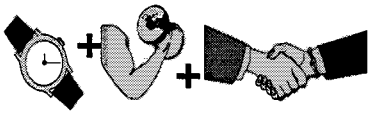


The Metroplan staff also frequently assists the sponsoring agency as cosponsors of the public involvement program. In the case of the U.S. Route 67/167 MIS, Metroplan has taken a leading role in the public involvement program, and staff members have seats on a project committee. They have also helped form a focus team of 15 people, including interested TAC members, representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and other business interests, and community members. This group provided input into the MIS's public involvement program and was involved at each stage of the study. A recent meeting was held in a

shopping center in the study area, using an open house format. It was well-advertised, using non-traditional display ads with a cartoon character, "Joe Bubble," who asked people if they were fed up with problems on the highway and invited them to help develop the solutions. However, participation was described as modest. One key recommendation that came from the focus group was that the draft environmental impact statement phase include a study of land use alternatives to reduce travel demand.

Metroplan also plays a role on other substantial capital projects that may not require an MIS. A downtown transit transfer facility in Little Rock has been identified as the number-one priority in the TIP. However, the facility has generated a substantial amount of public comment, both positive and negative, over specific issues like location or design. CATA has sponsored an informal set of stakeholder meetings with Metroplan's assistance. The meetings have helped to work through the concerns over site selection. Metroplan recognized these concerns in the 1995 TIP by approving the project with the condition that the public would have ample opportunity to comment on a specific site. These requirements allowed CATA to explore alternative sites or otherwise mitigate the concerns of those who opposed the project as proposed. In the end, a stakeholder meeting to pick a consultant to assist in evaluating alternatives drifted into a discussion about the alternatives already on the table, and consensus was reached on one of them.

Time, effort, and trust



While the list of innovative public involvement techniques developed by Metroplan is impressive, their effect has been made even more effective by the enthusiasm and energy with which they have been carried out. Both staff and committee members make substantial time investments to attend meetings and participate in other activities. Over 100 meetings of the full TAC or subcommittees were scheduled during the development of the Metro 2020 plan (approximately eighteen months). The meetings are generally held during weekday mornings. While some original members eventually had to drop out because of the burden, most of the group has persevered and remains active. Subcommittee heads also attend TCC meetings. TAC members are expected to act as conduits to hear and communicate the concerns of community residents and also get the TAC's message out to the grass roots. TAC members report that they are regularly called upon to report on Metroplan activities to their constituent organizations or other local groups. Metroplan staff provides them with assistance by attending meetings or providing literature and other technical support as needed.

The other important factor to which they attribute their success is the trust they have built during the process. This trust has come as Metroplan has delivered on each commitment it has made during the process. Some outlying areas were resistant to joining Metroplan at first, because they didn't fully recognize the benefits of membership, including a hand in decisions being made on the disbursement of Federal capital dollars. They were suspicious that the process would be controlled by Pulaski County (home to Little Rock and the center of the metropolitan area), and that they would be giving up too much control over local issues. Today, Lonoke County, the smallest and most rural of the four counties in the CARTS area and a recent addition to the Board, has embraced the process. Community representatives from the Quorum Court (county legislature) are preparing transportation improvement program project proposals, and the County Judge (chief executive) is currently serving as the Metroplan Board President and has hailed the new focus on regional issues.

Conclusions

Metroplan's efforts to promote public involvement have yielded positive results for the metropolitan transportation planning process and at the same time fostered new levels of cooperation on regional planning and development issues. Metroplan's planning director says this has been a ground-breaking effort, since most of the region's population had no expectation that its opinions would be sought on issues like these. In fact, the director admits that Metroplan's public involvement would probably not have been as far reaching were it not for the requirements set down by ISTEA. The public involvement effort has required a substantial commitment of staff resources and almost half of the budget for the recent long-range transportation plan. Agency representatives have begun to overcome their misgivings about giving up at least part of their control over the agenda and direction of their capital programs. They have recognized that the process has brought focus onto achievable goals, and that the community now has a greater appreciation and understanding of the complexity and tradeoffs of transportation planning.

The effects of the process on the Metro 2020 plan and its implementation are obvious. The plan includes provisions for bikeways and pedestrian improvements that probably would not have been priorities had their vocal constituencies not had the forum to be heard. Railroad grade separation, an issue not easily identified in capacity analyses and other objective measures, was also targeted as a priority due to the attention it received during the focus groups. However, it is not clear whether the TIP will be the funding source for grade separation projects.

The public's influence was also clearly felt in the recommended land-use provisions. The depth of its commitment to follow through with implementation is beginning to emerge, although there are still a number of institu-

tional and economic issues to be overcome independent of the transportation planning process. However, recent efforts by communities to establish land-use controls through the planning and zoning process have been attributed to the emphasis they received during the visioning process in 1994. This process—including the survey, Vision Week, focus groups, and newspaper insert—has been hailed as a watershed that succeeded in catching the sustained attention and enthusiasm of a substantial segment of the population and leadership. This attention carried through the remainder of the long-range planning process, and the vision survey remains the highlight that people most associate with Metroplan.

Metroplan has also been credited for being the impetus for a renewed spirit of cooperation on a number of regional issues, including an arena and convention center project proposed for North Little Rock and a continuing effort to foster commercial or residential redevelopment along the Arkansas River. Suburban areas have now embraced these proposals, since they realize that central Pulaski County is the most logical place for facilities that could serve the entire metropolitan area. While Metroplan's influence over these efforts is indirect at most, the effect of its actions on the planning process appears to have been crucial.

The spirit of cooperation is still fresh, and the concrete results are only beginning to appear. Nevertheless, the level of expectation among members of the community has risen as they have become more involved. While those expectations are tempered by a better understanding of the funding constraints for capital investments, the feeling is that the dollars are now going to projects the public supports and believes in.

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