First Edition/Summer 1996

Empowerment

The Participation Empowerment Guide

A Guide to Public Involvement in the Public Transportation Decisionmaking Process:

The Public Transportation System and Decisionmaking Process
Public Transportation Meetings and Contact Numbers
Participation Overviews and Resources

Sponsored by:

The Federal Transit Administration

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The Participation Empowerment Guide

Project Purpose

This project was funded by the Federal Transit Administration in order to help achieve the intended outcome of recent congressional legislation, which is:

> *"Informed and involved citizens who have access to public records and the decision making process."*

The purpose of this booklet is to help New Yorkers play a role in their public transportation system by describing the ways in which they can participate in the decisions that are made about it.

Project Info

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The Institute for Transportation Systems
of The City University of New York
The City College of New York
138th Street & Convent Avenue
New York, New York 10031
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Neville A. Parker, Ph.D., P.E.
PROJECT COORDINATOR/EDITOR: Mary Nagel Kim
CONTACT TELEPHONE: (212) 650-8050 (Participation Empowerment Guide). Limited quantities of the guide are available for free. All suggestions and comments regarding its content are welcome.

Disclaimer

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Citizens perplexed by the public transportation planning process

A member of the public thinking about the public money that's spent on public transportation

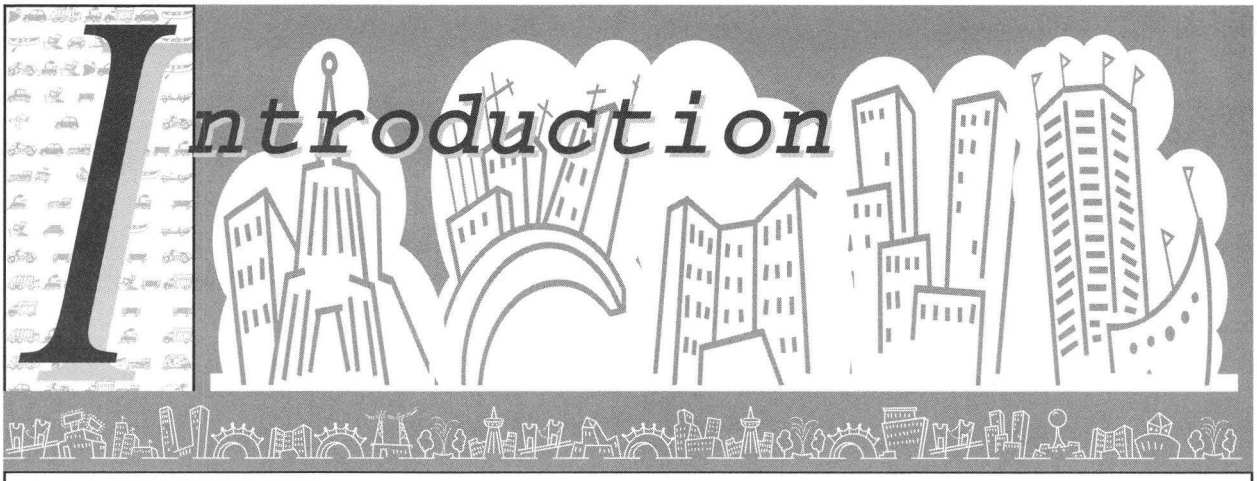
The Participation Empowerment Guide was written as part of a project funded by the Federal Transit Administration in order to help fulfill the objectives of recent congressional public participation requirements, the intent of which is:

"Informed and involved citizens who have access to public records and the decisionmaking process."

From the October 28, 1993, Federal Register (Final Statewide and Metropolitan Planning Rule), p. 48043.

It's our First Edition!

So if you want to talk to us about your bright ideas, or our oversights, corrections, esthetic considerations, or additions, *or* if you want to know how to get more copies, please call (212) 650-8050, and ask for the Participation Empowerment Guide.



Chapter Overview

The purpose of this chapter, and all you really need to remember, is that the sprawling network of roads, sidewalks, cars, buses, ports, ships, airplanes, subway stations, traffic lights, stop signs, trucks, and taxis that surrounds you the second you step outside your apartment door, is the transportation system, and *you paid for it.* There is a process by which this system changes and evolves, and that process is open to the public. Finally, the transportation system is an enormously complex system with a *simple purpose*: to move people and goods in the most effective and efficient way possible. The transportation system has a history which partially explains its present complexity and finally--we'll say it again--it's all yours!

It's a System

Probably the only time we're aware of the transportation system *as a system* is when we're in an airplane, flying over the City. From the air there's no line separating the neighborhoods, the boroughs, or the bordering states whose transportation system is interconnected with ours. All you can see is a network of streets, bridges, parking lots, rivers, ports, subway tracks and stations, railroads, trains, cars, trucks...*In other words*, all you can see is the transportation system.

It's a system you use every day. You can't step outside your home without using the transportation system. It includes the streets, the sidewalks, the traffic signals, the placement of the subway stops and the bus stops. It influences the quality of the air you breath. And probably helps determine where you work, shop, what doctors you chose, the beaches you go to, and what movies you see. But even if you decided to live inside your whole life and never go anywhere, the transportation system would deliver your heating oil, the food in the supermarkets, and the raw materials with which your building was constructed.

BUT IT DIDN'T JUST HAPPEN

Did you ever ask yourself who plans, builds, manages, and pays for this mostly public system? After all, the transportation system didn't just "happen." It evolved as the result of specific decisions made by specific human beings, a defined process of decision making that continues to shape the system on a daily basis.

Some of the agencies with responsibility for transportation in NYC: New York Metropolitan Transportation Council • NYC Department of City Planning • Port Authority of NY and NJ • NYC Transit Authority • Metropolitan Transportation Authority • NYC Department of Transportation • Federal Transit Administration • Federal Highway Administration • NYS Department of Transportation • US Department of Transportation • US Environmental Protection Agency • NYC Transportation Coordinating Committee • NYC Department of Environmental Conservation.....

What is that decision making process? Who is responsible for it? It is a complex process, and one that the federal government has recently mandated that the public be invited to play a role in. The public cannot play an effective and informed role, however, without information. This guide has been written to help provide that information. But before we look at the transportation decision making process, and the government agencies involved in it, or the ways in which the public can participate in that process, it might be interesting to have an idea of the physical dimensions of the transportation system itself.

Is It Big?

It's darn big. First of all, if we woke up one morning and the transportation system were gone--there were no roads, subway tunnels, subway cars, bridges or buses--it would take **$500,000,000,000** to build it again from scratch. That's five hundred billion dollars. Given the current rate of funding our region receives from the federal government for transportation, it would take *500 years* to rebuild, and then we'd be too old to use it.

If someone STOLE our transportation system it would take FIVE HUNDRED years to rebuild it!!

How Big is That?

We can tell you how big because we took these numbers from the **MTA.** The mass transit and commuter railroad part of the system includes **25** subway lines, with **5,917** subway cars and **648** miles of tracks. Then there are *Two* commuter railroad lines, with **1,941** railroad cars and **1,332** miles of tracks. There are **202** local bus routes and **30** express routes. There are **43** bridges, and **3,006** turnstiles, and **742** token booths, and **213** power substations, and **73** storerooms, and **54** security posts...and **65,465** employees!

Forget about how big it is!

But *forget* about how big it is, and forget about the fact that all together, about 22 different government agencies have some say or responsibility for our transportation system. The point is, *Why* are *you* reading the Empowerment Guide in the first place? Well, we'll tell you. The reason you're reading it is to help fulfill the reason it was written. And the reason it was written was to help fulfill the intent of recent *Congressional* legislation, and the intent of recent Congressional legislation is: **Informed and involved citizens who have access to public records and the decision making process.**

So this Guide is a (First Edition) attempt to address this issue. And this issue, although it is a long-standing one, has recently been given new emphasis by this Congressional legislation we mentioned. For now, think of this legislation as a big pile of money Congress promised could go toward the country's transportation network, and that this money has strings attached to it so that the transportation agencies that want to use the money (and they all do, naturally) must fulfill certain obliga-

tions. And one of the newest, most interesting obligations is: The public has the right to participate in the regional transportation planning process!

But What IS it?

Q: But what IS the regional transportation planning process? And how, when, and where do you participate in it?

A: The regional transportation planning process is the sum total of all decisionmaking that goes into deciding how to spend any of the public money that is made available for public transportation by our State, Federal or Local governments. The region is defined to be all of New York City, Long Island, and Westchester and Putnam Counties, but in this Guide we'll basically be talking about New York City.

So that's the regional transportation planning process, and like we said, it involves zillions of dollars and agencies and employees (and we haven't even mentioned the rules and regulations) and a zillion transportation *things* (like those switches, and tracks and bridges and cars we mentioned.)

And Why SHOULD You?

But hey, *why* participate in it? So Congress said you had to be invited. That doesn't mean you have to accept, does it? No, and you're right, there's no good reason. You *shouldn't* participate in it. You should let someone *else* get involved. Just because this system was designed and funded to serve the public, just because the transportation planning process involves the expenditures of BILLIONS of dollars of PUBLIC money. And just because this process, in which the public has been invited to participate, has a dramatic impact on levels of service, traffic safety, convenience, noise, air pollution, the economy, where you go, who you see, where you don't go, who you don't see, what jobs you apply for, what employers come to, or leave, the Region, the City, your Community. And just because *other* people are going to be involved in making these decisions (like your neighbor) doesn't mean that *you* should participate in it.

With You or Without You

Look, the final bit of reverse psychology is this: the transportation decision-making process is going to go on with you or without you. So you might as *well* poke your head in from time to time, and see what it's all about, because if you don't your neighbor will. And who's got the time, you ask? Almost nobody! Unless you think of participation as something you could ease into, at a comfortable rate. Something you might do not just tomorrow, or next week, or next year, but for the rest of your life, designing for yourself a comfortable, sustainable way of doing it.

Two Points about that Last Point

And we've got two points to make about that last point. First of all, participating in the processes by which your City is shaped, including the one by which your transportation environment is designed (this is a much less plain way of saying "transportation planning") is not going to change any-

Did we tell you? When we say "participating," we mean ● Going to meetings (We've got the lowdown on types, frequencies of meetings, how to get invited and what to wear! (kidding)) ● Reading newspapers & newsletters ● Writing to politicians & newspapers ● Joining non-profit groups ● Getting on mailing lists ● Voting ● Pondering the nature of the transportation universe: *How did it all begin? Were subways created, or* made?

thing overnight. The only things that change overnight are, well, let's put it this way: the transportation environment is not one of them. But participation would change a heck of a lot over a gradual period of time if a lot of people participated in an informed way, at a sustainable pace, over a number of years. *Hmmm*. So that's the end of the first point we were going to make about the point before. And we've forgotten the second point, so let's just say this:

Nothing Changes Overnight!
(Hardly ever)

The Guide is All Things to All People

Of course we'd never say such a thing! But we will say that the Guide is designed to support every level of participation, from the most minimal (read an article in the newspaper) to the most maximum (quit your job and attend the dozens of public meetings that are held every year.) The Guide describes and outline the various ways that exist for the public to participate in the transportation process. (It also describes a few of the ins and outs of that process. See the section called Transportation Planning!) But we should back up for one moment and say:

It wasn't just the law that made them do it!

Even *before* the new public participation requirements, transportation agencies had established many ways to bring public input into various points of the decision-making process. And since the law, the agency which is responsible for coordinating transportation planning in the whole metropolitan region--the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council--has developed a public outreach process that gives the public access to the overall, comprehensive regional transportation planning process. And it's this agency's position (they're really a Council, not an agency, but for plainness's sake...) that the more participation the merrier! That they can only *really* do their job well *with* the support of the public. Cool.

Other Roads Lead to Transportation

But we're not just talking about transportation agencies, there's other routes to transportation, like your Community Boards (very good source of information on what's happening, transportation-wise, in your neighborhood because the transportation agencies often use them as a point of contact to reach the community.) And we even have a Chapter on Community Boards, called **Community Boards.**

THE END of this mini-section

So that's the story. There's a big huge complicated process with a simple purpose that you can have a say in. The law says you *have* to be invited to have a say in it, and even *before* the law, there were plenty of ways to do so. Participation, to err on the side of plainness, means attending meetings, but there are other ways to participate, and increasingly so. (Electronic bulletin boards, and even some hot new INTERNET ways are in the works.)

The Guide is divided into the following Sections: **The Introduction** ● **Public Participation, contains Charts and Keys** ● **Community Boards, contains responsibilities and contact numbers** ● **The Transportation Planning Process, contains discussion of some of the elements of the process.**

The Design of this Guide

We will use several icons throughout the text. Whenever, in the text, we are describing a process or a meeting that is specifically open to the public, we will include the running man, which represents a citizen eagerly rushing to get involved. If the citizen is at the top of the page, the entire process that is being described on that page is open to the public, and specific ways of participating in it have been established. If you want to know what those ways are, turn to the sections in the Guide on Participating, it's that simple! The fellow with the open arms is also used to represent the possibility of participation, in both the Charts and the Key to the Charts.

And although this is a plain-language Guide, from time to time we will include summaries that take an even plainer view. The eyeglass symbol, then, is meant to symbolize absolute clarity.

Part of the plain view that we take in this guide has to do with money, especially when we are looking at the transportation planning process. Keeping your eye on the money is one way , an extremely simplified way , of keeping your eye on the ball, so to speak. Money, in most circles (not just transportation), is not called money, but something else (and this something else, to be fair, ususally indicates how the money is collected, stored, or distributed.) So in the text when we are referring to money by one of its many other names--funds, grants, bonds, tolls, mass transit account, general funds--we will include $ the icon, just to remind you that what we're really talking about is money.

What do we mean when we say public participation is the *law?* Well, we're referring to the fact that Congress recently attached public participation requirements to the spending of federal money for transportation. That law is called, for short, ISTEA, and we'll be explaining it in more detail later on. But in addition to ISTEA, there are many other laws or regulations, or requirements, urging the principal of public participation, and perhaps most importantly of all, there is the general democratic principle of public participation. The transportation agencies have long reached out to the public, but the recent law has enabled them to justify an even greater effort in this direction.

Read Me!

The Participation Empowerment Guide is more like a Berlitz than a Cassal's. In other words, we've taken a lot of short cuts, and made a lot of generalizations and simplifications. That was necessary in order to provide the plain, common sense overview of an enormously complex process. So, reading this guide won't make you an expert but it should give you enough information to allow you to ask meaningful questions, to ponder the transportation universe.

Finally, please use the Guide to *empower* your relationship with the people who operate, plan, and manage the public transportation system. They operate (work) in an uncertain funding and regulatory climate (they don't know how much $ they are going to get to use from year to year and they don't know

What DO transportation people do? And why DO they have to go to college to do it? For an idea of what sorts of broad issues transportation planners have to deal with, see the Section entitled Transportation Planning

what new laws are going to be passed that tell them what they have to accomplish, whether or not they get the $ to do it, in other words.) The Participation Empowerment Guide is designed to help give you the tools to be an "educated consumer" of public transportation.

Not the Answer to your Dreams

This guide may not be the answer to your dreams, but it is the answer to your questions! During the first phase of this project introductory letters went out to Community Organizations, and people called in with their own questions about the Transportation System. The questions that people asked, and the issues that their questions raised can be summarized as follows:

Confusion! Every time I turn around I hear about another agency, another acronym, another problem, another meeting, another project, another billion dollars. *Why* is it so confusing?

Who's *who?* Which agency does what? How can I find out? Why are there so many agencies? How can I tell who's who and what's what?

Process? What is the transportation planning *process?* What do you need a process for? Just keep the subways and the buses clean and safe and get them where they're going on time, and keep the fares down. What more is there? What do you need a process for?

Information! What sources of public information exist about the public transportation system? Why does it seem so difficult to get information on specific projects, studies, plans, meetings? Where can you find information about these things?

Arbitrary! What determines which subway stations are renovated and which are closed? Or which bus routes are canceled and which are not? It all seems so arbitrary.

System? What transportation system? You mean the subways and buses, right? Why put the word "system" in there?

Money! Why is there so much money involved? Where does it come from? Where does it *go?*

Participation? What is public participation? Why participate? Participate in what? How do you find out how and where to participate?

Transportation *Professionals?* What do transportation people *do?* Teach people how to get on and off buses? Why would you have to go to college for that? What's so professional about transportation?

But Maybe That's Not You

It may be that our examples of citizen distress are too extreme. Maybe it hasn't even *occurred* to you to get distressed just because you pay 65,000+ people to deliver excellent public transportation system and services to you and you can't figure out what it is they do. And come to think of it, maybe you didn't even know you were paying them. And come to think about another thing, maybe even if you *did* know you were paying them, it was just enough to complain about what a lousy job they were doing and never think, *Gee, maybe our public servants need our sympathetic and informed involvement and support!*

Okay, so maybe you don't *think you* get as distressed as our worried citizens, but we've taken the liberty of deciding that *deep* down inside, you *do!* Besides, we thought those strange characters just might catch your eye.

Well, that's all, folks

That's it for this Chapter, except for our **Thanks**, and The Little Transportation History, which follows.

The Participation Empowerment Guide was written as part of a project funded $ by the Federal Transit Administration. The project was funded in order to help fulfill the objectives of ISTEA's public participation requirements.

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So if you need to talk to us about bright ideas, oversights, corrections, esthetic considerations, additions--or if you want to know how to get more copies--please call (212) 650-8050, and ask for the Participation Empowerment Guide.

Thank You!

An incalculable debt of gratitude is owed to all those community organizations and members of the public who provided feedback on the Guide, especially by asking the questions that guided the writing of the Guide in the first place. In addition, the following acknowledgements must be made:

The work of this project has been made possible by a grant from the Federal Transit Administration, and the City College of New York, which provided matching funds.

Without many conversations with transportation professionals from every area of transportation, clarifying points, giving overviews, supplying documents which helped to reveal the broad outlines of the transportation planning process, this Participation Empowerment Guide would not have been possible. We must also specifically thank the Federal Transit Administration, both the Regional and Federal Office, for providing project management support.

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

We must also thank Project Oversight Personnel at the City University Research Foundation and its Administrative offices at the City College, as well as our colleagues and support staff at the City University Institute for Transportation Systems (home of the Participation Empowerment Project.) At the Institute, we must also thank the many undergraduate and graduate students who provided feedback and advice on the Participation Empowerment Guide.

A great number of public documents were consulted in putting together this Guide. These are listed below, by agency. (Here we should stress, however, that all errors and omissions remain the sole responsibility of the editor!)

New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) for Critical Issues, Critical Choices (The Long Range Plan), and the Transportation Improvement Program, as well as NYMTC Brochures and Newsletters, Quarterly Technical Reports, and material presented at Technical Exchange Meetings.

New York City Transportation Coordinating Council (NYCTCC) for the User Friendly Version of the draft subregional Transportation Improvement Program.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), for its Public Participation Guidelines, and its 1994 Annual Report.

Federal Transit Administration (FTA), for its Position Papers on the Livable Communities Initiative (issued jointly by FTA/FHWA), and its many brochures and information pieces.

United States Department of Transportation (USDOT), for its brochures on ISTEA, and other programs and initiatives.

Federal Register, published periodically by the Congress, for its Final Planning Rule on Metropolitan and Statewide Planning

New York City Department of City Planning (NYCDCP), for material delivered at its Brown Bag Luncheons.

(This way for a little history) ☛

A Little History of the Transportation System

This is a little, informal, and in some cases oversimplified, History of Transportation. In the opening section we claimed that the transportation system evolved by design. Well, that hasn't always been the case. In fact, part of the complexity of the present system is due to its origins in the Nineteenth Century.

Originally, the transportation system was not public: it began as a strictly entrepreneurial enterprise, involving dozens of competing private companies that sprang up to fill the growing transportation needs of the major, fast-growing metropolitan region. Earlier versions of transportation in New York have included stagecoaches and horse-drawn buses, an extensive "commuter" ferry system and later, street cars, or trolleys. Traffic was a nightmare then, as it is now, and there were frequent public uproars about loud, dirty, and impassable streets. But these complaints were directed at horse-drawn cabs and buses, rather than automobiles and diesel-driven buses.

And when the automobile first became a major component of traffic, and the first parking provisions were established, New York City merchants complained that providing street parking for automobiles would ruin business!

When the system went public, around the time that the first subways began to be built, almost 100 years ago, many of the original private transportation providers--who had established routes, labor relations, and operating approaches--were formally incorporated into local and state government structures, with many of the divisions between the original private companies maintained. This was necessary, under the circumstances--it was already too late to start from scratch!--but it explains, in part, why there are so many different operating authorities today, and why, in some cases, the system seems to defy sense.

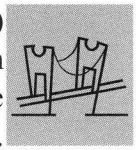
Bridges and Buses and Trains!

To have an even clearer picture of today's transportation system, it is helpful to look at the history of its separate elements:

ROADS The way roads are managed, who manages them, the amount of public funding they receive, whether they collect tolls, how their upkeep is funded - is determined in large part by how they are classified. Basically, there are 3 major classifications. These are: 1) Roads used mostly for travel between places within the city, 2) Roads that extend out of the city and are used for travel to other sites within the state and, 3) Roads that are used for travel between states.

BRIDGES Most of the City's "great" bridges were built during the era of "Great Bridges." That is, from the late 1800s to the

early 1900s. This was a period when new materials permitted advances in bridge design. Bridges fall into several different design types, including suspension and span-type bridges. A bridge's functional classification (similar to roads) determines which transportation agency or authority is in charge of bridge maintenance and repair.



PORTS New York City is no longer one of the world's great harbors. Freight shipping activity has been divided between New Jersey, Florida, and ports reached through the Mississippi River and the St. Lawrence Seaway. And today, more freight enters through the region's airports than before. Still, shipping plays an important part and historically is what helped make New York City a world class city. There is a specific entity established to manage New York and New Jersey's ports, The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

FERRIES Dozens of private ferry companies were in existence at the turn of the century. There was little or no government regulation of fare or safety issues. Ferries began to decline (we couldn't even find a drawing of one for this Guide!) until recently, when new ferry routes started up, and several plans for publicly-subsidized, privately-owned ferry routes have begun to be put forward.

RAILROADS There was a "great age" of railroads, when there were literally dozens of passenger lines which ran at full capacity. The age of passenger rail dominance began to end in the 1920s, until the remaining lines were consolidated by the federal government into a single system, known today as AMTRAK, which is largely subsidized by federal funds. At its height, railroads moved an enormous amount of the nation's freight. Freight was transferred from cross-country rail to inner-city trolley lines, and thus, down into the City. The movement of freight into the City is a contentious issue today, and an increasing share of freight enters over the road network, via truck.

SUBWAYS The first subways in New York were elevated. The last elevated line was torn down in the 1930s. The first major underground line was the IRT - today's #1,

#2, #3 and #9 lines. The IRT was built in 1903, followed by the IND. Although they ran above ground, the first "trains" to run within the City of New York, it should be remembered, was the trolley, or street car system. The last trolley lines went out of business in New York decades ago and the decline of the trolley paralleled the end of the trolley era in Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston and other American cities.

BUSES The first bus lines in New York were horse-drawn (and you had to give the horse a carrot in order to ride them. No, you didn't.) The first bus companies were established as businesses, rather than as public transportation. Theoretically, this meant that competition could operate to keep fares down and service quality high.

In reality, it also meant that routes were neither guaranteed nor regulated by government, which therefore had little influence over safety and other issues.

TAXIES The first taxies were also horse-drawn, and it was hard in those days to tell them from the buses. They were established as private, rather than public concerns (they were not funded by public taxes, or as a public service, but in order to turn a profit. Therefore, there was little or no government regulation of routes and fares.) Today, the Taxi and Limousine Corporation regulates and ensures the safety and viability of the taxi industry.

AIRPORTS Airports fall into two major classifications: domestic and international. The classification of the airport will determine what agency or agencies operate and maintain it.

New York City region airports include: Newark, New Jersey, LaGuardia International Airport, John F. Kennedy International Airport, and several smaller, commuter airports. Although they do not fall under the definition of "surface" transit - with which this guide is mainly concerned, because airports generate an extraordinary amount of traffic -- both in the number of airport employees, visitors entering and leaving our region, and the amount of freight that enters the region, which must be loaded onto trucks and transferred over the City road network to points of destination.

FEET The very first means of transportation were the feet, and on their feet human beings came to live in every part of the world. Today, travel by foot is becoming an increasingly honored and recognized mode of travel, especially when referred to by the Latinate term, pedestrianism. Recent legislation has even set money aside specifically for pedestrian improvements. The act of walking has always been difficult for artists to capture, but several popular foot-based forms of travel are pictured here.

NOTES

Participation Overview

People

elect

Government

Federal
State
Borough
City

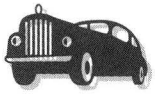
pay

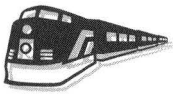
Taxes $$$

decides what percentage of Taxes $$$ will go toward public transportation. (A)

stay informed of transportation decisions by attending meetings and being involved in:

- (B) Community boards
- Community organizations (C)
- (D) Environmental organizations
- Good government organizations (D)
- (D) Good transportation organizations
- Transportation agencies' public meetings (E)
- (F) Permanent Citizens Advisory meetings
- MTA hearings on major service changes (G)
- (I) Elected officials
- News media (J)





Participation Overview Chart

Everything on this page is part of the transportation agencies' regional planning process. See the section on "Transportation Planning," under Long Range Plan, for more.

Newly established Borough President Transportation Action Plan (T)

is consulted when developing

20 Year Transportation Plan is developed (LRP) (L)

based on

Studies made to identify current and future transportation needs. (M)

and

The LRP prioritizes transportation needs AND estimates amount of $$$ to meet them.

LRP Must Adhere to New Rules for Spending Money Wisely. Rules developed at the federal, state and local level. Called Transportation Management Systems

then

Each year projects are put forward which would help fulfill these objectives (N)

Each year, as federal funding becomes available, a "call letter" is issued and transportation agencies propose projects. Other organizations can propose projects that would help meet the region's transportation goals as defined in the LRP, but these must be in partnership with a sponsoring transportation agency. The process by which projects are accepted or rejected for funding is called the **TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM** update process. see next column

Annual Transportation Improvement Program Update Process Begins (O)

Projects are rated on whether they advance objectives of PLAN

Projects must also be determined to advance other objectives, such as Clean Air.

If project involves big $$ a process is initiated called a Major Investment Study. (P)

then

Alternatives Must Be Studied

and

Environmental Impacts Must be Assessed

Might delay project for years or cancel.

All Accepted Projects are put in a a document called the TIP (Q)

Examples of Projects that appear in the **TIP:**

- Reconstruction of the Westside Highway
- *Rehabilitation of Bridges Over the Grand Central Parkway*
- Resurfacing of Harlem River Drive
- Vehicle Emission Testing
- Install Fiber Optic Cable for IVHS
- Community Based Projects
- *Operating Assistance for NYC Private Bus Program*

Projects are implemented

Progress is monitored in Quarterly Reports (R)

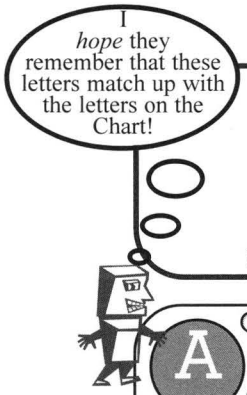
End of Annual Cycle

New Cycle Begins

Indicates where regulations state that the public *must* be invited to participate in process. See following pages for how to be invited!

(A) Indicates that process generates documents available to the public. See corresponding letters (A,B,C...) on following pages for titles and access to documents!

Participation Overview Chart



Information Key to the Participation Overview Chart

This section provides expanded details for each of the participation possibilities & topics pointed to in the Participation Overview Chart.

A

Public $$$

Government budgets are a matter of public record but may not always be in decipherable form (even our elected officials sometimes have to spend weeks, and months, figuring them out.) There are not-for-profit groups which focus on making different aspects of the budget and the budgetary process accessible to the average citizen. The **Citizen's Budget Commission**, for example, analyzes the **New York City Budget**, and makes "plain language" budget breakdowns available to the public for the cost of postage. The City Budget is sometimes available through CITY-BOOKS, but it is recommended that you order the Executive Summary of the City Budget, rather than the entire budget in raw form. Devoted to clarifying and instructing people on the federal budgetary process is another not-for-profit group called Committee for a Responsible Budget, based in Washington D.C. They hold a series of budgetary workshops around the country they call Hard Choices to which people are invited to attend and, in teams, work out a model of the national budget themselves. This group also has software and workbook material available for sale. For following budgetary issues in the media, remember that the fiscal year is different than the "real" year, and that the City, State, and Federal fiscal years begin on different dates. Some KEYWORDS to watch for when tuning into media coverage of these issues include Authorization, **Appropriation**,, and Allocation. Remember also, that a lot of action occurs within the various committees of our Federal, State and Local governments. Cities always have to lobby for what they feel is their fair share of public money, and of that, transit has to fight to get its piece. Many transportation and environmental groups will inform their members which committees and elected officials to write to when important transportation funding battles are being fought. Remember, the budgetary process is complicated on one hand, but simple on the other: in the end, it's money, public money, and who gets how much. Increasingly, a source of information on our government's fiscal and other affairs is the INTERNET.

B

Community Boards

There is a section of this guide called **Know Your Community Boards** because they form such an important link between the citizen and involvement in public transportation at the community level. The section will tell you how to find out what Community Board you live in, what responsibility and authority Community Boards have, what they have to do with public transportation issues, and how they interact with City Government. The Public Meeting Calendar in this Guide will also give you a sense of the frequency and subject matter of public Community Board meetings. Community Boards have their finger on the pulse of all major development in the area, including major transportation projects being studied or planned. *Community Boards are different from Community* Organizations *in that the Community Boards are an* official *part of our City government, and for the most part, Community Organizations are not.*

C **Community Organizations** is a catch-all term that includes Church Groups, Block Associations, and every other type of group, association, or organization that focuses on the community. Often, by virtue of their commitment to quality of life issues in the community, these are some of the best groups to get involved with if you want to have an impact on public transportation issues in your community. We have included a sampling of different types of Community Organizations in this guide, under the section entitled **"You and Your Public Servants."**

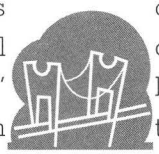
Community Organizations

For more information on groups to get involved in consider contacting: The National Council of Churches, the Uptown Chamber of Commerce, or your Community Board

D These three categories of groups, **Environmental**, **Good Government**, and what we're calling "**Good Transportation**," are often not-for-profit organizations. Read more about not-for-profits in **"You and Your Public Servants."** Their strength is in their specialized focus on one issue or area of issues. Often (but not always!) you become a member of one of these groups by making an annual contribution ($10,$15,$20) for which you would might receive a newsletter that keeps you up to date on the issues and the group's activities. It provides a valuable way of staying in touch with transportation issues in other cities around the country. We include **Environmental Groups** because transportation plays an important role in the quality of the environment. Good Government groups can be a valuable source of information for broad trends in government, i.e., a trend to slight funding for mass transit in favor of building new roads, or the reverse. There are, by one account, over 20,000 non-profit groups in NYC. If you would like to get involved in a transportation-related non-profit group by volunteering your time, you may call the Mayor's Voluntary Action Center at (212) 788-7550.

Environmental, Good Government, Good Transportation...

E The Transportation Agencies hold meetings that are open to the public (for an idea of how frequently and on what topics, see the Meeting Calendar in this Guide. And see MTA Hearings later in this section.) Many of the meetings fall under the auspices of "Community Relations," and are the agencies' way of conducting outreach to communities which might be impacted by a potential transportation project. The best way to find out about that category of meeting is to stay in touch with your Community Board. There are also meetings held by the Transportation Agencies that are part of the ISTEA public outreach process. These meetings are intended to include the public in the process of planning public transportation. Therefore the timing of these meetings is generally driven by the planning cycle: the process of putting together the Long Range Plan (which takes a 20 year view of transportation) and a related, more concrete 5 year plan, which gets down to the brass tacks of actually selecting specific transportation projects to spend public money on. Generally, these meetings are held by the organization designated by Congress to coordinate transportation planning in our region, an agency called NYMTC (say "Nim Tek.") NYMTC has developed a variety of ways for the public to have access to its documents and reports. In addition to attending meetings, they have established an electronic bulletin board and an 800 number.



Transportation Agencies

EXTRA!
Read more about the Long Range Plan in the Section called, "Transportation Planning."
ALSO!
See the Key to the Calendar for more about how to contact Transportation Agencies.

Key to Participation Overview Chart

SEE KEY TO CALENDAR FOR EXACTLY HOW TO CONTACT ALL GROUPS!!!!!

F

The **Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee** (PCAC) of the MTA is a group in a category by itself. Established by an Act of the New York State Legislature to represent the users of the MTA system (which includes New York City Transit subway and buses, the Long Island Rail Road, and MetroNorth Commuter Railroad) each chapter of the PCAC holds monthly meetings throughout the year on a variety of topics pertaining to the planning and operation of the public transit system. (For a typical schedule of meeting times and topics see the 1995 Calendar of Meetings included with this guide.) PCAC publications are available to users of the MTA transit and commuter system. You can call the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee, and ask to be put on their mailing list to receive meeting times and agendas. The PCAC also conducts and publishes reports on different issues having to do with the public transportation system.

Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee

G

The MTA holds Hearings on major service changes. Hearings are usually held in the evening hours, in each Borough. For changes that impact a single neighborhood a Hearing will be held specifically for that community. An example of such a change would be the closing of a subway station entrance after a particular hour of the evening. As of this writing, there is no mailing or notification list to be on which ensures that you will receive written notice of upcoming Hearings but Hearing notices for major service changes are well-posted in the subway stations and buses, and to keep abreast of possible transportation changes in your own community, take advantage of your Community Boards! (Read the Community Board section, which describes authority and responsibility of the Boards.) The public is invited to make comments during Hearings, with public comments being restricted to a length of 3 minutes or less. It is necessary to register at the beginning of the Hearing (or just before it begins) if you want to be given a turn to speak publicly. Hearings generally run late, even with the 3 minute rule, to give all the invited and registered speakers a chance to speak. A telephone number is provided at the bottom of each MTA Hearing notice for members of the public who wish to register to speak at a Hearing.

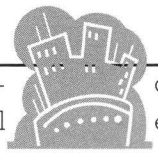
MTA Hearings

Pssst!!
What *is* "transportation?"

Well, Webster's says (in part): ". . .**1a:** an act, process, or instance of transporting or being transported (arranging for the ~ of his luggage). . .**b:** the conveyance or movement of sediment or rock materials either as solid particles or in solution from one place to another on or near the earth's surface by water, ice, air, or gravity. . . **3:** banishment usu. to a penal colony--compare deportation. . . **4a:** means or conveyance of travel from one place to another (his ~ is a battered coupe). . (cluttering up the road with transportation). . .

Webster's Third New International Dictionary

Key to Participation Overview Chart



I — Elected Officials

Your elected officials maintain community offices. The Green Book will carry some of this information, so will your telephone directory (the blue page section of the White Pages), your Community Boards should know, the various non-profit groups you belong to will know who to contact about what, what is the most appropriate and useful way of contacting your elected officials on transportation issues. An excellent source of information on the activities of the City Council is available from **NYPIRG**. Their newsletter is called **Council Watch**, and covers legislation of importance of New York City, including transit and transportation-related legislation.

J — News Media

All of New York's newspapers have a reporter or a "desk" whose assignment includes reporting on public transit and transportation news and developments. The news may not always directly concern transportation, but may involve pollution and clean air issues, federal and state funding, developments in new clean fuel and clean engine technology, or information on what subway stations are going to be renovated, for example.

L — The *Long* Range Plan

The Long Range Plan is a document which the Transportation Agencies produce jointly in order to organize and guide their transportation improvement efforts. It identifies what the transportation needs of the entire region are and will be over the next 20 years. Compiling the Long Range Plan and carrying out the studies and analysis that are necessary to determine what long range transportation needs will be, and how best to meet them, is an enormous cooperative undertaking. As part of the transportation planning process, the public is invited to participate, usually through meetings held by **NYMTC** and **NYCTCC**. In addition to the full Long Range Plan document, there is an Executive Summary, of the Plan, written with the public-at-large in mind. This document serves as a sort of "transportation state of the region." The transportation system as a whole is considered: from subway and bus service, to the highways, airports, and bridges.

EXTRA!
We'll say it again:
Read more about the
Long Range Plan in the
Section called,
"Transportation
Planning."

M — Studies made to determine needs

In order to help determine the transportation needs of the region, transportation agencies carry out studies which also examine various proposed solutions to the transportation needs which are determined. The public is invited to attend meetings at certain stages of the studies, and their input is solicited. If the public transportation needs of a particular area or community of the City is being studied, members of the public living and working in those areas are invited to attend the meetings. One of the best ways of finding out which studies are being proposed is to contact your Community Board, and ask them if any major transportation projects or studies are being planned for your community. The studies will generate documents analyzing the different proposed solutions to the problem. These are public documents.

Key to Participation Overview Chart

Projects are put forward for funding

Each year a "Call Letter" is issued by the Metropolitan Planning Organization and its member groups. The Call Letter describes the amounts and types of funding which are available for that fiscal year. It also refers to the transportation improvements which the funding will be directed toward. The Transportation Agencies (and groups working in partnership with them) will respond to the Call Letter by proposing transportation projects for funding. The projects go through an elaborate approval process before they are funded. As part of the comprehensive regional planning process, the public is invited to attend meetings held by the transportation agencies for the purpose of discussing how that year's Call Letter will be responded to.

Accepted Projects included in the new TIP

The group of projects which meet all the criteria for funding become the year's Transportation Improvement Program, and are published in a publicly available document of the same name, or "TIP" for short. The TIP is a technical document of perhaps limited use to the average member of the public, but it does represent the end result of the project selection process, and the public's involvement in that process. The public meetings that are held throughout the TIP update cycle (and every few years, the Long Range Plan update cycle) vary in subject matter, depending on the current regulatory and budgetary challenges and issues facing the transportation agencies as they carry out the planning process. The progress of the funded projects is reported in quarterly progress reports, which are also public documents.

To find out more about how to contact the Transportation Agencies and other Community Organizations listed in this Key, turn to the Key to the Calendar. We will repeat the information on NYMTC here, however, since they are responsible for leading the Long Range Planning effort among the Transportation Agencies, and the Long Range Planning effort embraces the entire metropolitan region, not to mention being far-reaching "time-wise," as well, with a twenty-year outlook. So, to attend meetings on the Long Range Planning cycle, call NYMTC and ask to be put on the meeting notification list for the **Transportation Improvement Program** (TIP) and the **Long Range Plan**. Call the NYCTCC (NYC Transportation Coordinating Committee) and ask to be put on their list as well. NYMTC has an 800 number which includes information on upcoming meetings: the number is (800) 938.6957, and the information is available in English and Spanish. The TIP document is a public document (a technical document, up to 100 pages long), and is available for your review at NYMTC. You must call them @ (212) 938-3300 to arrange to view the TIP document (and all other publicly available documents). NYMTC's 800 number also provides information on other NYMTC documents.

Key to Participation Overview Chart

NOTES

KEY TO CALENDAR

The purpose of the Calendar is to give a quick sense of the frequency and variety of transportation meetings open to the public over the course of a fairly typical year. (The best representation would have required a 2 or 3 year Calendar, the better to reflect the Long Range Plan/Transportation Improvement Program update cycle.) Also, the Calendar gives only the meetings and Hearings held by local City and State transportation agencies, the State created Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA and the Community Boards, which function as a link between Citizens and City government. It does not include transportation-related meetings held by non-governmental groups (such as the groups described as non-profit, elsewhere in this guide.) In the descriptions below, each color corresponds to a different series of meetings on the Calendar. When a Star-and-Moon figure is displayed it means that the series of meetings is held after work-hours. A smaller Star and Moon means that some, but not all meetings are held after work-hours.

NYMTC Technical Exchange Meetings These meetings are part of NYMTC's Public Outreach effort. They offer the public the opportunity to learn about regional and technical issues associated with public transportation. The meetings for 1995 included ● *Highway Capacity, Friend or Foe?* ● *Regional Long Range Plan* ● *Transportation and Economic Development* ● *Economic and Demographic Data: Trends and Forecasts* ● *Geographic Information Systems Applications* ● *Unified Planning Work Program, What Are Our Priorities?* ● *How Are We Investing In Our Region?* ● *Freight Planning* ● Serving Our Customers ● Meetings are usually held at 1:15 pm. To be placed on the meeting notification list, call (212) 938-3300.

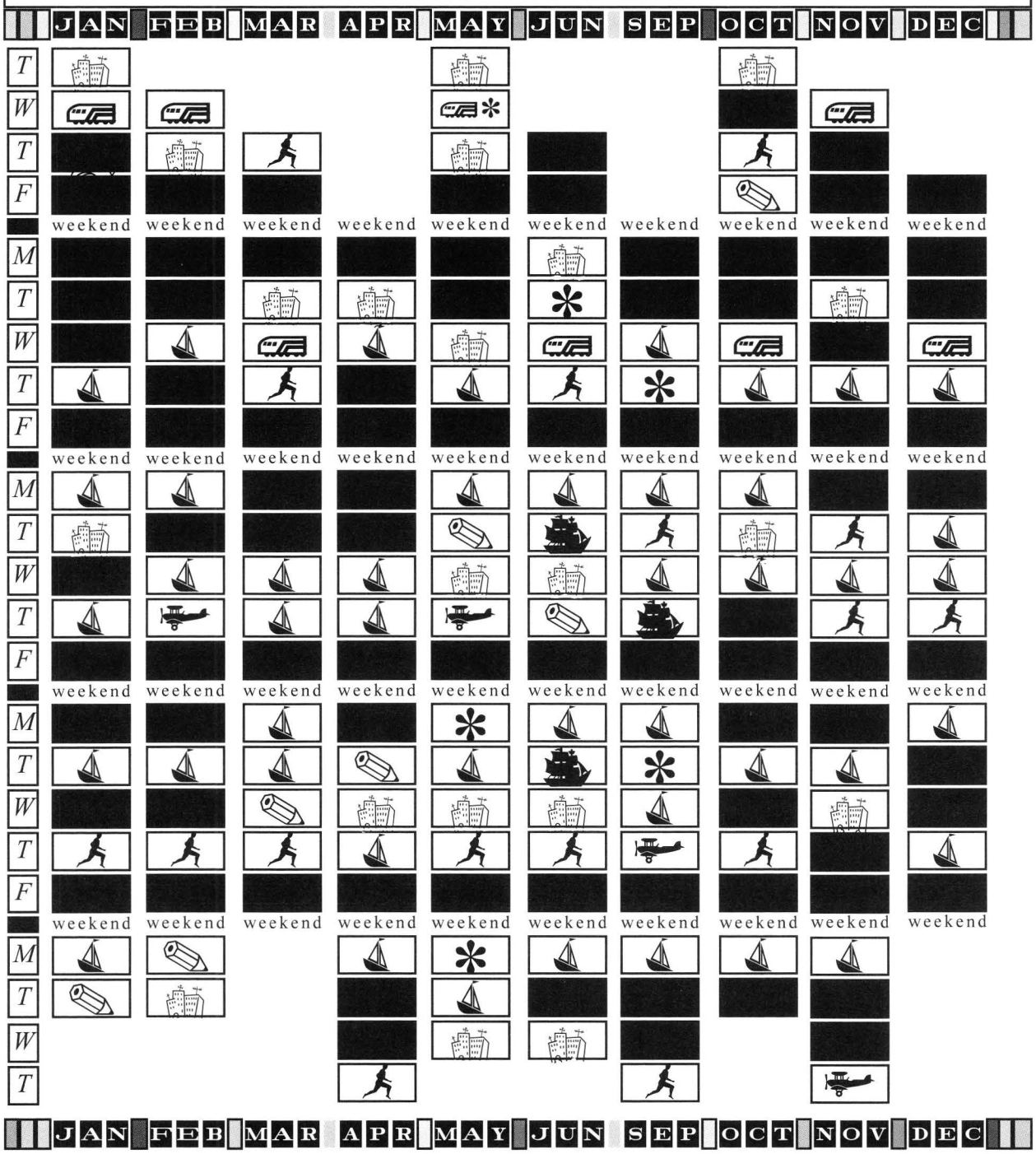
NYMTC's Program Finance and Administration Committee (PFAC) Meeting The PFAC Committee of NYMTC handles several pieces of important business for the Metropolitan Transportation Organization, and their meetings are are part of NYMTC's public outreach program. Meeting topics have included ● Discussion of Possible Methods for Identifying and Defining ISTEA-Mandated Major Investment Studies ● A Regional Perspective of Investment Studies ● Transportation Models/Data Projects ● Activities of Transportation Operators ● To be placed on the meeting notification list, call (212) 938-3300.

NYMTC & NYCTCC Long Range Plan, Transportation Improvement Program Update Meetings These are the core cycle of meetings for people who are interested in participating in the transportation planning process from a comprehensive, regional perspective. NYMTC is the Planning Organization for the entire Metropolitan Region; NYCTCC is the Transportation Coordinating Committee for New York City. If you are interested in the process by which federal money to the region is turned into public transportation for the region, you will want to attend both NYMTC's and NYCTCC's meetings. Meeting topics have included ● Overview of the Transportation Improvement Program ● Surface Transportation Enhancement Projects ● Transportation-Related Clean Air Programs ● Meetings are held at various times, occasionally in the evening hours. To be placed on NYMTC's meeting notification list call (212) 938-3300 and request to receive notices for LRP and TIP update meetings. Call the NYCTCC as well, @ (718) 482.4562 and request to also be placed on their list.

NOTE *All of the meetings on this page are held by* ***NYMTC*** *or its* ***New York City Transportation Coordinating Committee*** *(there is one for Long Island, and one for Putnam and Westchester Counties, as well). NYMTC and its Coordinating Committees are responsible for coordinating the development and updating of the* ***Long Range Plan*** *(which sets the transportation objectives and priorities in the region over the next 20 years) and the* ***Transportation Improvement Program*** *(a schedule of the transportation projects receiving federal funding for that year which, when implemented, will advance the objectives of the Long Range Plan.) You can also find out about upcoming NYMTC meetings (and available documents) by calling the automated telephone information system which NYMTC has established to make information conveniently accessible to the public.* ***NYMTC's automated number is (800) 938.6957***

Meeting Calendar

1995 TRANSPORTATION MEETINGS



Meeting Calendar

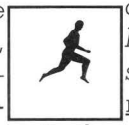
KEY TO CALENDAR

(...CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

Community Board Meetings. Everyone who lives in New York City lives in a Community Board District (see the section on Community Boards in this guide.) Each Community Board forms a number of committees to address important community issues. Typical committees include those such as ● *The Public Safety and Transportation Committee* ● The Economic Development and Employment Committee ● The Comprehensive Planning Committee ● *The Environmental Committee* ● Committees usually meet once a month in the evening hours. To find out which Community Board District you live in, so that you may call and be placed on their mailing list, call the Mayor's Community Assistance Unit @ (212) 788-7418.

Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee

The Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee was established by an act of legislature to represent the users of the MTA system (NYCTA subways, buses, LIRR, MetroNorth, Bronx & Staten Island surface transit system.The meetings for 1995 included: *Updates on federally funded transit planning studies* ● *Updates on transportation related efforts to reach federally mandated clean air standards* ● *Conversations with MTA and NYCTA chairmen, directors and project managers* ● Discussions of subway station security issues ● *Discussions of independent groups' transit ideas and suggestions for the metropolitan region* ● *Discussions of proposed service reductions in bus and subway service* ● Meetings are usually held once a month from Noon to 2:00 pm. To request to be placed on the meeting notification list, please call (212) 878-7087. The PCAC is divided into 3 chapters: users of the NYCTA system, users of the LIRR system, and users of MetroNorth Commuter Railroad.

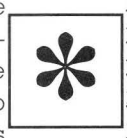


MTA Board/Committee Meetings

The MTA Board has several committees whose business is open to the public. The Committees are ● LIRR/LI Bus Committee Meeting ● *Bridges & Tunnels Committee Meeting* ● *MetroNorth Committee Meeting* ● NYCT Committee Meeting ● Planning/Real Estate Committee Meeting ● *Finance Committee Meeting* ● *Audit Committee Meeting* ● *MTA Regular Board Meeting* ● *The items of business which are handled include policies and practices in the areas of each of the Committees.* Board and Committee meetings are held monthly, for the most part in the morning hours. To be placed on the meeting notification list write to the MTA, requesting that your name be placed on the list.

MTA Hearings

The MTA holds Hearings on major fare increases, service reductions and major capital and operating assistance requests. There were MTA Hearings in 1995 which fell into each of these categories. The MTA publicizes its Hearings by placing notices on buses and in subway stations. Each Hearing is held five times, once in each Borough. Hearing notices will give speaker registration information, for those wishing to speak publicly at the Hearing.



Studies Studies of transit needs and possible solutions are conducted by a variety of transportation agencies. Large studies are often given a name, such as "Airport Access," or "East River Crossing," which refer to the area or focus of the study. A study is often the first notice you will have of future transportation projects and changes in your community and often, your Community Board will be the first to know that a major transportation study is being conducted. During the course of most studies, meetings are held in order to inform the public of the issues involved and to solicit feedback on the options being studied. The agency or agencies conducting the study may sometimes form a "Public Advisory Committee" made up of community members recommended by the impacted Community Board. Some of the studies-related meetings held in 1995 included ● *NYC Transit Authority East River Crossing Public Advisory Committee* ● *NYSDOT Staten Island Expressway Corridor Study Advisory Committee* ● *PANYNJ, MTA, NJT Access to the Region's Core Transit/Transportation Study.* ● *Scoping Meeting/Environmental Impact Study for Eastside Major Investment Study.* ● Study meetings are held by all the transportation agencies. To find out what studies are being held in your community, call you local Community Board. (See the Community Board section on this page.)

Meeting Calendar

NOTES

Know Your Community Board

This excerpt from "Know Your Community Board" was reprinted by permission of the Mayor's Community Assistance Unit.

Membership Community Boards are the local representative bodies of New York City's **Community Districts***. There are 59 Community Boards throughout the city. Each Board consists of up to 50 unsalaried members appointed by the Borough President with half nominated by City Council Members of the Board district. Board members are selected from among active, involved people of each community with an effort made to assure that every neighborhood is represented. Members of the Board must reside in or have a significant interest (work in, own property) in the community.

Meetings Boards usually meet once a month, except during the summer. At these meetings, members address items of concern to the community. **Board actions and decisions are basically advisory***. ***Board meetings are open to the public*** and the public must be allowed to speak during a portion of the meeting. However, only Board members may vote. In addition, Boards frequently call public hearings on the City's budget, on **land use*** matters, and other major issues to give the people of the community a chance to express their opinions.

Committees Board committees do most of the planning and work for the items which are acted on at Board meetings. Non-Board members may apply to join or work on Board committees. Each Board establishes the committees and procedures it feels will best meet the needs of its area.

Responsibilities Community Boards have an important role in dealing with **zoning*** matters, land use, the City budget, **municipal service delivery*** and other issues relating to their communities' welfare.

Zoning Matters Any change in or variance from the zoning resolution must come before the Community Board for its opinion and that opinion must be considered in any decision on a higher level.

Land Use Community Boards must be consulted on placement of most **municipal facilities*** in the community and on other land use issues. They also initiate plans for the growth and well being of their communities.

City Budget Community Boards assess the needs of their own neighborhoods and make recommendations in the City's budget process to address them.

Other Community Matters Any problem which affects part or all of the community, from a ***traffic problem*** to deteriorating housing, is a proper concern of a Community Board.

Limitations The Community Board, its District Manager, and its office are empowered to serve as advocates for the community and its residents. ***They cannot order an agency or official to perform any***

task, but **City agencies** do respond in a spirit of cooperation. Community Boards have been remarkably successful in resolving the problems which reach them.

The District Managers A District Manager and Board staff are hired by a Community Board to fulfill the policies of the Board, implement procedures which cut through the red tape that impedes the delivery of City services , and act as an one-stop center for the Community District. The District Manager plays many different roles. For example, complaint taker, municipal manager, ombudsperson, information source, community organizer, mediator, advocate and much more. The District Manager is above all, a public servant with the most direct ties to their local communities.

Resolve Complaints The primary responsibility of the District Manager's office is to receive and resolve complaints from community residents. Although most of the complaints deal with municipal services, any community-related complaint may be handled by the District Manager's office.

Continued on next page

*Key Terms

Community Districts Community Districts are drawn up by the City Council, and are subdivisions of Boroughs. District boundaries are redrawn from time to time.

Board actions and decisions . . . advisory This is important, in order to understand how the Community Board works to have influence on City government. It can gather opinions and give advice.

Land Use Land use is about the use of the land. There are laws, rules, and regulations, developed over many hundreds of years, that determine what use the land can be put to, and who has the right to say, other than the actual owner of the land. Land use issues can be very involved, and very theoretical, including what sort of uses

Zoning Refers to the body of laws, rules and regulations that govern land use.

Municipal Service Delivery Another way of saying this is, "the delivery, to you, of every service that your government is supposed to provide you with." In this case "government" refers to your City government and its local representatives.

Municipal Facilities A sewage plant or bus garage is a municipal facility.

City Agencies All the different branches of your City government. The branches exist to provide the public with services and to ensure the smooth running of the city.

Continued from the previous page

Know Your Community Board

Other Activities of the District Office Many Boards' offices have assumed the responsibilities to providing additional services. These might include assisting with Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption Forms, Housing Assistance Applications, Half-Fare Applications. etc. They also process permits for block parties, street fairs, etc. In addition, some District officers may handle special projects, including organizing tenants and merchants associations, coordinating neighborhood cleanup programs, publicizing special events, and more, depending on community needs. ☆ *-Excerpt from The Community Assistance Unit, Office of the Mayor*

Know Your Community Board is published by the Community Assistance Unit. They have given us permission to reprint it. To find out which Community Board you live in, call them:
COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE UNIT, OFFICE OF THE MAYOR @ [212] 788.7418, or call your Borough President's Office - Manhattan @ [212] 669.2527) or Brooklyn ([718] 802-3866)

Real Life Examples

of transportation issues dealt with by local Community Boards

Major Construction on Malcolm X Blvd

Service Cuts on the M18 Bus

Local Subway Station Renovation & Safety

Major Investment Study for 125th Street Crosstown Connection

Bus Layover Garage Placement

For more about what opportunities Community Boards offer to participate in public transportation decisionmaking, see the icon for Community Boards in the Calendar and the Key to the Calendar, as well as the icon for "Studies," (pages 23 and 24.) See also the Participation Overview Chart, page 14, and the KEY to the Participation Overview Chart, on page 16.

Community Boards

Manhattan

Board No. 9
555 W 125 St
Tel:864-6200

Board No.10
215 W 125
Tel:749-3105

Board No.11
55 E 115 St
Tel:831-8929

Board No.12
711 W 168 St
Tel:568-8500

Bronx

Board No.1
384 E 149 St
Tel:585-7117

Board No.2
1029 E 163 St
Tel:328-9125

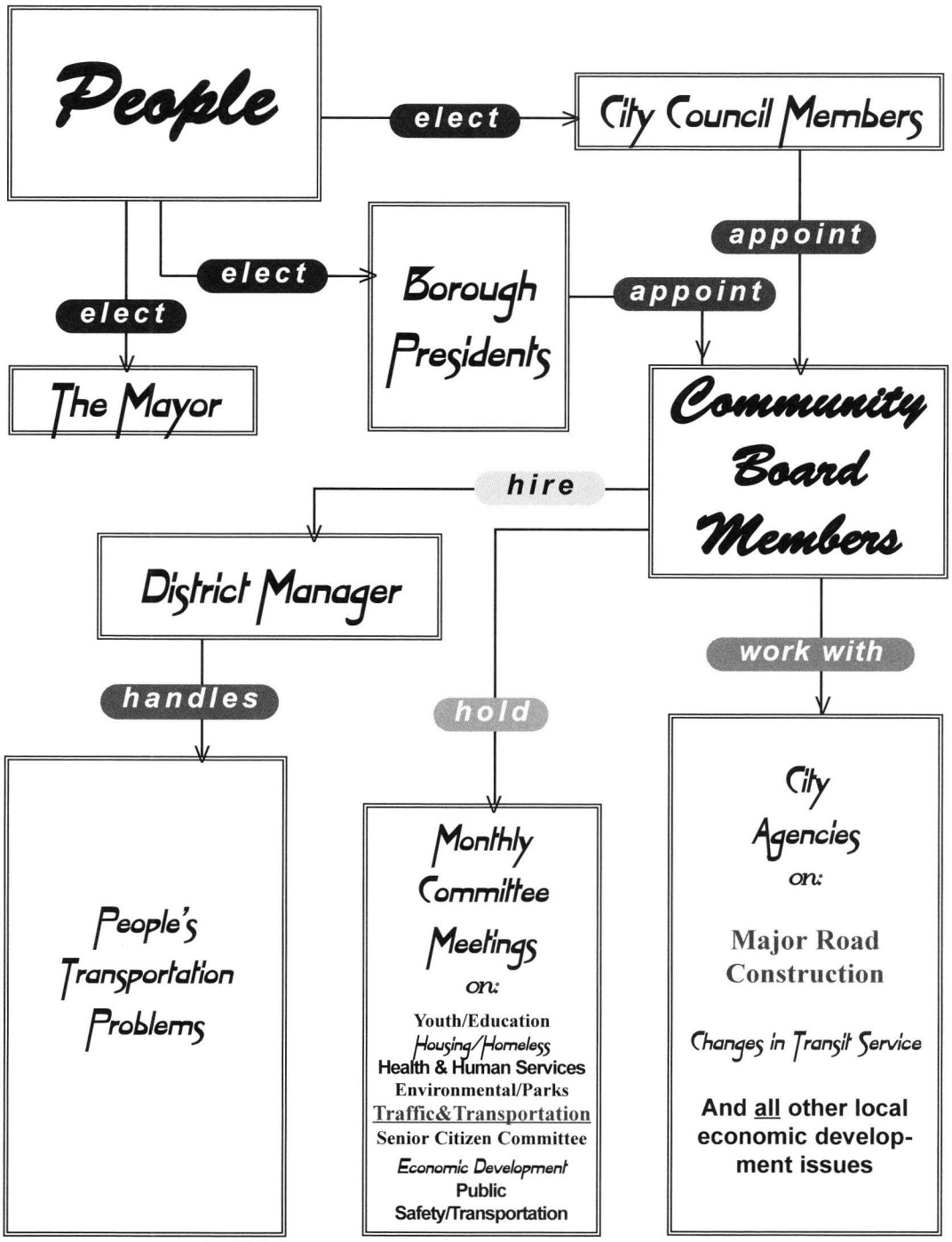
Board No.3
1619 Boston Rd.
Tel:589-6300

Board No.4
1650 Selwyn Ave.
Tel:299.0800

Board No.5
BCC
Tel:364-2030

Board No.6
1932 Arthur Ave
Tel:579-6990

The Relationship Between Community Boards, City Government, and Local Transportation Issues



Know Your Community Boards

Transportation Planning

Chapter Overview

This chapter touches briefly on several issues having to do with what's called Transportation Planning. All Transportation Planning really involves, from a plain point of view, is everything that's involved in Planning Transportation. So the subsections of this chapter include: **Who ARE Planners?** **Data, statistics, demographics, projections, forecasts and so on** **Rules And Regulations** ***Money, Money, Money*** **There's a Plan for us** and **Transportation Thinking**.

Also, when you see the Participating Citizen at the top of a page it is to remind you to look in the *calendar & meeting* section of the guide to find out how to attend meetings on these topics.

Planning Transportation

The process by which billions of dollars of public money turn into public transportation is called the transportation planning process. It is shaped by many laws, rules, regulations, policies, issues, and carried out by many transportation organizations. In this section we'll look into the process by which transportation "ideas" turn into transportation "reality." But first let's explain the money part of this chapter in the plainest way possible:

When our national and our state governments give us money to spend on transportation (they get the money from us) we can't just spend it any old way we want to because, first of all, we have to spend it according to the spending plan we've developed (it contains our transportation priorities and it's NEVER called a spending plan) and secondly, the money that we get often comes with strings attached to it (don't call them strings.) (End)

Transportation Planners

When people hear that someone's "**in transportation**," the first thing they usually do is volunteer a complaint about how crowded or expensive the subways are, or how terrible traffic is. But transportation planners have got even bigger problems than that. Seriously. They "see" problems that are invisible to most of us. They see air pollution and traffic jams 15 years from now! (They plug census data into their computers.) They see good projects that should have been built 50 years ago, and weren't! (Because the money, will power, or public interest dried up.)

WHO ARE PLANNERS????

But just who are planners, anyway? For the purpose of this discussion we'll lump all the people in the business of making decisions about public transportation into a group and call them transportation planners. But you shouldn't get the idea they all work in the same location, all have the same job titles, or do the same thing. They're members of a profession. There are transportation planners and decision-makers at every transportation agency you've ever heard of - and some you haven't. Their jobs range from analyzing census data, to taking pollution counts, to developing advanced mathematical equations to describe the flow of traffic.

Data, statistics, demographics, projections, forecasts and so on

And if you're wondering why transportation planners don't just get on the subway or hop on a bus to find out what we need, or ask you, well maybe they *should*, and sometimes they *do*. But it's also much trickier than that because transportation planners have to put *our* money where *their* mouth is. Consequently, they tend to look at the transportation system differently than we do. In other words they can't just say, "Hmm, I think I'll spend a billion dollars *here*!" They have to back up their decisions with "facts." And the facts tend to take the form of ***NUMBERS***, which are never called numbers but **data**, **statistics**, **demographics**, **projections**, **forecasts**, and so on. Most transportation decision-making is based on these numbers, and to understand the process at all you have to have some familiarity with these numbers.

It's a numbers game

But it's not a crap shoot. In fact, it's a numbers game in order to take some of the risk *out* of it. There are so many numbers it's hard to know where to begin, except maybe in the usual place which is, like we said, **They aren't called numbers, usually.** That's not really because people are trying to hide the fact that they're numbers, it's probably because they're trying to keep the numbers straight in their heads. Of course, they don't keep the numbers in their heads, they keep them in computers - and they manipulate the numbers with models.

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The numbers include how many people live *in* the region, drive *into* the region, drive *out* of the region, drive *through* the region. How many people ride the subway: where they get *on*, where they get *off*. Ditto for the buses. And then of course there are the commuter railroads, and the number of trucks that use our roads every year, and the amount of freight that comes in, and the number of people using the airports, and the number of traffic accidents, and, and, and... And *then* there are numbers having to do with air pollution: How many particles of pollutants can be detected with air quality monitors placed in the most traffic congested parts of the City, for example?

Numbers, Models.....

Those are particles that are under 10 microns in diameter (you can just feel that with your fingertips), don't forget. Then there are numbers having to do with the region's economy which, it is widely-claimed, is influenced by the quality of our transportation system. Of course, that's not just the economy *now*, but the economy next year, and the year after that: in other words, the economic growth rate. Then there are crime statistics. And on-time performance statistics. And the number of gallons of paint it takes to paint the George Washington and all the other bridges! There are also numbers having to do with labor issues, like wages and benefits.

And *all* of these numbers--like the ones having to do with the economy--must be projected forward in time, say about 20 years. That's where the models come in handy.

You might have thought that models were just for looks, but in the transportation world they've got work to do. They crunch numbers that the human brain just couldn't bear to crunch. (Of course, there are a lot of human brains crunching human-sized numbers, too.) But models aren't born - they're made. And like anything that's made, they have to be re-made and tinkered with. One of the *Super Models* that's really getting tinkered with these days is the Air Quality Model. That doesn't, necessarily, mean that anything is wrong, it just means these things take time.

Meanwhile, as a member of the public, you don't need numbers to tell you how the transportation system is doing. You rely on your eyes and ears. It's not that transportation planners don't do that, it's that eye-and-ear reports don't carry much weight when you're spending **$12,000,000,000** in public money over the next 5 years. When you're spending that kind of money, you do have to cover your bases. - And when you are making plans for one of the largest regions in the world, you really can't do it any other way. You need your numbers. But where do those numbers come from? And what are their names?

Where do the Numbers come from??

Well, one of the major sources of numbers is the United States Census, which is conducted every 10 years. (Even those numbers have to be 'crunched' by the Federal Government before they're available for distribution). From the Census our regional transportation agencies not only know where people live, but where the population growths and shifts have been over the last 10 years - and, therefore, where they are likely to occur over the next 10 years.

An example of a complicated number

But the Census doesn't just indicate how many people live where, the last Census also asked people how they "journeyed to work." Hence the term, "journey-to-work." People were asked whether they journeyed to work via  ,  ,  ,  , or  ? Well, the choices weren't that interesting but at any rate, transportation interests purposely asked the Census Bureau to ask people this question, so they could get a number that would let them know how many people took mass transit as opposed to using the private automobile. And sure enough, they got a serious number as a result. But even that number had its complications, because even if you know *how* everyone in the region journeys to work, you don't know where their work *is* (that's not something you can ask on the Census.) So the journey-to-work numbers are matched up with other numbers, obtained by different means, to figure out how many people from point **A** are traveling to point **B**.

Once the computers cranked out this information, our transportation planners got an unpleasant surprise (one they suspected, but this gave them proof): Journey-to-work patterns had changed significantly from the last Census. There are now an increasing number of people traveling from suburb to suburb to go to work, whereas the traditional pattern had been people from the suburbs traveling into the City to go to work. The other suspicion that was confirmed by the last Census was that the rate of automobile use is increasing, which has implications for the region's plans to improve the quality of the air. But that's just the Census. What other numbers are there?

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One more number, a little number

There are "little" numbers we haven't mentioned yet. An example would be the numbers that dictate the timing of the traffic signals. Timing traffic signals is a science! It's a science our lives depend upon, too. The timing of traffic signals dictates the flow of automobile traffic -- to make sure it *does* flow -- and the safety of intersections to pedestrian traffic. Teams of people specialize in the timing of traffic signals - and do advanced research on it.

All of this can make you just want to throw your hands up in the air, until you remember how you would feel if you were asked to fly without instruments through the fog. If you were smart, you'd refuse. Well, planning transportation without numbers would be just as foolish. Numbers are transportation planners' instruments. With them, patterns emerge that could not be seen with the naked eye. The point is, numbers are here to stay.

There's more to Numbers

But there's more to numbers than just numbers (and we've only mentioned a tiny fraction of them). There are the *skills* that are involved in dealing with those numbers. In fact, most people that work in the planning side of the transportation business have to have advanced numbers training. For the engineering profession (traditionally, many people in the transportation profession have been engineers) that has always been true, but it's becoming increasingly true of all the other professional skills involved in transportation, as well.

PLANNERS SEE THINGS THAT WE DON'T SEE

Just as there are foot doctors, brain surgeons, bone specialists, general practitioners, and baby doctors, there are engineer, computer programmers, human resource managers and air pollution experts on the transportation side. - And just as doctors can give a name to parts of the body we didn't even know we had, transportation planners see, and talk in terms of aspects of the transportation system we didn't know existed. This sometimes makes it seem as if they aren't talking "plain," but often, it's just that a transportation professional sees lower than we do (steam, water pipes, electrical cables in the street) and higher than we do (air pollution) and **w i d e r** than we do (how our transportation system hooks up with the systems in New Jersey, Westchester, Connecticut) and *farther* into the future than we do (they must, by law, assess what transportation needs will be 20 years into the future, and work within the context of those needs.) But that's the least of it, because then there are the rules and regulations:

RULES AND REGULATIONS

There are laws, policies, procedures -- rules and regulations -- that govern every aspect of transportation planning, and not a single penny is spent that isn't influenced by at least one, and in most cases, many of them. But what are these rules and regulations about?

They involve the air we breath, union labor relations, and Americans with disabilities. They involve contracting, bus franchises, social and environmental impacts and the types of recycled material that can be used to pave the streets. They involve safety issues, local government issues, and coordinating the transportation activities of all the separate agencies so that they work together toward the common goal of improving public transportation. They involve civil rights issues, public participation issues, and budgetary issues. In short, they involve everything.

But who makes these rules and regulations? Our Federal Government, our State Government, our Local Government - and

the transportation agencies themselves. And why do they make them? In most cases to address problems that arose without them. Take clean air for example. It's pretty easy to say we've got to improve the quality of the air we breath, but how are we going to do it? The Clean Air Act Amendment says we *have* to do it, that's the law. Then the rules are written that tell us exactly how to do it - and the rules specify everything down to the last detail.

Without the law...

But what's important to understand is that without the law, and its corresponding rules, transportation agencies (for the most part) could not justify spending public **money** on cleaning the air, for example, because transportation agencies are *public* agencies, and one of the ways that the public tells them what to do with the public money they get, is by having their elected officials write laws.

Now that you know more than you ever wanted to know about transportation, you may be asking yourself whether you really *need* to know it. And the answer is *No!* - Because you are the public -- and therefore, the customer -- and the customer is always right. The only thing you *do* have to remember, if you want to be a more powerful customer however, is that public transportation "happens" within a context that most of us are not experts in.

One last word

This doesn't mean that the public does not have a right to make demands on the transportation system, the public has the ultimate right. It just means that we have to remember that our public servants (most transportation professionals are public servants) are dealing with issues that we have asked them to deal with (by electing the public officials who write the laws that address the issues that we elected them to address), and that if they don't deal with those issues, transportation agencies can't get public money, because that's how the laws work. Which leads us to section on the next page: Where Does The Money Come From? And Where Does it Go? But first let's end this section with two of the Acts (often the source of rules and regulations) that influence transportation planning.

INTERMODAL SURFACE TRANSPORTATION EFFICIENCY ACT OF 1991

Congress said let's make $152 billion available to transportation over next 6 years, giving greater share than usual to urban transit and research, and let's insist that transportation agencies include the public in their decisions, and insist they follow the planning guidelines we've come up with here, and let's insist they prove to us they're really doing those things before we give them any of the money.

CLEAN AIR ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1991

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency needs the cooperation of the U.S. Department of Transportation to meet clean air goals. Before any transportation project receives federal funding, therefore, Transportation Planners must certify it won't hurt air.

Money, MONEY, Money, ssssssssssssssssssss

Where Does The Money Come From? And Where Does it Go? ♪♫

Ultimately, all of the money comes from us, the public. Some of it we deposit directly into the system in the form of $ subway and bus tokens, and $ road and bridge tolls, and something called $ users' fees (buses and trucks that use the transportation system.) Some of the money is raised by certain of the agencies (as a rule of thumb, the ones with the word "authority" in their names) by the $ selling of bonds to the public, and some of the money comes from $ rental fees when, for example, transportation agencies rent out property they own or $ rent the right to use their railroad tracks to other railroad companies. But the money we're mostly concerned about in this guide is the money that the State and the Federal government give to public transportation in our region on a year to year basis.

Funds, appropriations, taxes, subsidies, and so on

It's all money, but none of it is called money. It's called **funds, appropriations, subsidies, fuel oil taxes, general funds, mass transit accounts, dedicated accounts, highway accounts** and so on. These differences are all extremely important to people who work in the field of transportation, but not to us. For the most part, we'll call just call money *money*, or sometimes taxes, or funds. What's important to us is that the money comes from the public: ***it's public money***. What's also important to us is how that money makes its way to our region to be used for public transportation, and what "strings" are attached to it.

Some Strings Attached

Often those strings are strings that we asked our elected officials to attach, by voting for them based on concerns and issues that we, the public, have. (Many of these concerns and issues are listed under the section, above, called Rules and Regulations.) Of course, strings are never called strings. There is a certain pile of money made available by the Federal government that cannot be spent, for example, unless the region certifies that it will use the money on transportation projects that can be shown to help improve the air quality problem. This pile of money is called "C-Mack," for **C**ongestion **M**itigation **A**ir **Q**uality funds. Other money is made available only on the condition that it be used for research, and that the research be of actual use to the transportation agencies in the region.

CONGRESSIONAL ACTS

The different piles of money are often created by an Act of Congress. When Congress passes an Act (which is signed into law by the President), the Act authorizes the amount of federally-collected public money that can be given to transporta-

tion over a certain number of years. And these Acts also spell-out, rather specifically, what the money can be spent on, and what it must accomplish.

Iced Tea

The most important Act for transportation right now is called the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, but you can call it ISTEA (pronounced Iced Tea). In 1991, ISTEA authorized the spending of $152 Billion on transportation in this country over a six-year period. Exactly how much each region of the country receives of this money is based on formulas that people spend their lives working on, but essentially it has to do with population levels as recorded in the last Census. This money is not given to the regions all at once (it's given year by year), and often less is given (but never more) than is actually authorized in the Act. Therefore, our region's transportation agencies never know exactly how much they're actually going to get from the Federal Government, until they get it.

Our State and Federal Governments collect money from the public through various taxes. Some of these taxes were created specifically to raise money for transportation, and some of these taxes are divided up for a variety of uses. In either case, our region is then given a share of these taxes. When it comes to the Federal share, we are competing with everyone else in the Country. When it comes to the State share, we are competing with the rest of the State for the money. It is never entirely certain exactly how much we are going to receive, until we receive it.

The Federal Government starts its year on October 1. The State Government starts its year on April 1. On those two dates our public transportation agencies receive their share of the public money for that year. In order for us to use the Federal money we have to meet certain obligations (strings). One of the strings that ISTEA attaches to the money the Federal Government distributes to transportation involves public participation - which is how the writing of this guide came about. In fact, the "critical strings" attached to ISTEA are the public's right to be included in transportation planning (which is transportation spending) and that all federally-funded transportation activity in our region be coordinated, via a single transportation agency (called the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council), in order to best further the transportation interests of the region, as a whole. How this central agency -- call it NYMTC (pronounced "Nim-Tek") -- accomplishes this is the subject of the next section, **The Long Range Plan.**

THE

Long Range Plan...

There's a Plan for us

Someone has a plan for us and it's called the Long Range Plan. The Long Range Plan, which was developed over a period of several years, forecasts and prioritizes what the region's transportation needs will be over the next 20 years. (If you want to know how they did that, look at the section called, It's A Numbers Game.) The Long Range Plan is a spending plan, because it dictates what we're going to spend our federal money on for the next two decades.

The development of the Long Range Plan was mandated by ISTEA, which also mandated that the public be included in drawing-up the plan. This Plan is updated every few years - and it's a public document, which you can obtain by calling the agency whose job it was to formulate the Plan. The way the Plan actually works to influence the way that Federal money is spent (Remember, we can't spend the Federal money unless we agree to meet the obligations attached to it.) is by first being "broken down" into smaller, 5-year plans, called Transportation Improvement Programs, which everyone calls "TIPs." TIPs are actually lists of projects that the transportation agencies in our region submit, in hopes that they'll get funded by the Federal money being made available that year.

This process of turning the submitted transportation projects (or transportation "ideas") into real projects with real money behind them is called the Project Selection Process, and it happens every year. The submitted projects are "checked" to make sure they advance the objectives formulated in the Long Range Plan, and to make sure they adhere to all the rules and regulations that govern transportation activity in our region, especially the ones that are attached to the Federal money (the "strings.") Once the projects are approved (which involves many committees and many meetings) they are included in the TIP, public meetings are held and -- if our region's TIP is agreeable to the State (which has its own TIP) -- it is approved, and the transportation projects start to become transportation reality. Simple, right? Well, not so simple, but before we go on to the next section, we'll recap this whole business in plainer terms:

More Money Business

There's a way our State and Federal Governments have of controlling the spending of money that they give to us (after they've gotten it from us.) It goes by many names but what it boils down to is rules and regulations that the transportation agencies have to follow. You could say that the Governments control the money to make sure we do what we say we want to do with it (clean air, equal access, public participation.) Our local transportation professionals must make sure that their transportation decisions fulfill the objectives that our governments impose - that's part of their job.

....and other things

The way our local transportation professionals do this with Federal money is by developing the Long Range Plan (a spending plan that allows us to spend wisely for the future), and by making all the transportation agencies "compete" for the money - in what is called the Project Selection Process. The public does not need to become experts in any of the processes covered so far in this chapter, but does need to know that there is a process because the transportation professionals the public deals with -- when they go to public meetings, or try to improve subway or bus service in their communities, or try to get a share of the contracting work -- are operating within this context, which is invisible to most of us. But, there's more! The section on the next page will look at the planning process in terms of approaches, philosophies, in terms of *Transportation Thinking*.

Remember, the **Long Range Plan (LRP)** puts forth the region's long term (20 years) transportation needs, and describes the choices involved in addressing those needs. Congress said that metropolitan areas had to develop a long range plan *called* the **Long Range Plan**, and that the spending of public money on transportation would have to be guided by this Plan. During the development and updating of the Plan (every 3-5 years) many public meetings are held. NYMTC, the agency which develops the LRP, is a collaborative forum of elected officials and transportation and environment agencies which directs the transportation planning process in the metropolitan region. Following are excerpts from the **LRP**, which all told, is about a 100 page document

From The Long Range Plan

The **LRP** *is premised upon a vision of what the regional transportation system should be in the year 2015, one that supports economic activity and quality of life. It presents NYMTC's goals and objectives to guide transportation decision making in the context of the specific issues identified below, as well as funding constraints limiting the degree to which transportation improvement can be expected. This* **LRP** *was developed through an extensive public participation process. An extended outreach component of the* **LRP** *development process will attempt to build a regional consensus for an expanded transportation program along with the financial plan to fund it.*

According to the **LRP**, the most important issues confronting the region are:
The fastest growing travel markets in the region are those which are not well served by transit, both in suburban areas and in portions of New York City ● Economically disadvantaged individuals who do not own automobiles are increasingly isolated from employment opportunities and are unable to participate fully in society ● The mobility and accessibility needs of the elderly and physically challenges must be addressed ● The region requires efficient freight movement for continuing health and economic vitality. JFK and LaGuardia airports serve as important gateways to the New York metropolitan region and are important segments of the regional economy: yet, ground access to both airports has become increasingly inefficient ● Therefore, unless the region is willing to look at ways to overcome funding gaps for transportation needs, regional mobility will continue to decline. However, the region must also balance its need for mobility with its concern for environmental quality. The Americans with Disabilities Act mandates access to transit systems for people with disabilities but provides no funding for such access improvements. The region will have to make critical choices to assure its future economic role while complying with these various legislative mandates.

Transportation Thinking

Maybe the best way to start looking at transportation thinking would be to simply look at some of the catch words you'd hear if you hung around with transportation people, or attended public transportation meetings. Some of these terms will seem obvious, even annoying. After all, shouldn't something like "service improvements" just be taken for granted? Sure, but remember that public transportation is always dealing with uncertainties in how much money the State and Federal Government are going to give them. So, often they have to give catchy names to ordinary things in order to lobby for the money they need to do those ordinary things, like making service improvements. Often, they do gear up to improve service, and then whammo! The money's gone! (The Federal or State government cuts the amount they allot to transportation.) In fact, many people in the field of transportation have been around long enough to see their best plans -- and hard work -- go down the drain, or at least be put on hold for **10**, **15**, ***20*** years. But at any rate, all of the terms on these 2 pages illuminate the ways in which transportation planners *think* about transportation in the region -- not in terms of numbers, or funding -- but in terms of issues.

INTEGRATED REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

There are places you cannot get to without having to switch from subway to bus, or bus to subway. It should be easier to do this in terms of schedules, information, and fares: the whole system should be integrated. Recent legislation--ISTEA--places an emphasis on achieving this.

MOBILITY

Generally, this means that freight that comes into the city should be able to move more easily and more quickly, and there shouldn't have to be traffic jams: it should be easier to get around. The transportation system should provide us with better mobility.

QUALITY OF LIFE

This means that everything to do with transportation should be nicer, easier, make more sense and, in the mind of the customer -- that's us -- be worth the money that's charged for it: the day to day quality of our lives should be made so much better by what the transportation system provides us we should all feel as if our lives here have more quality.

CUSTOMER-FRIENDLY

The transportation system should "care" what the public thinks of it, because the public is the customer. It's the same as the expression "user friendly" in the computer world.

CONTINUING INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE

This means not letting the bridges fall down, or tunnels, tracks and roads deteriorate. For a long time it was very difficult for the transportation agencies to get either the public or the politicians excited about the idea of buying hundreds of millions of dollars of grey paint (there's more to it than that) until the bridges started to fall down, and the roads started to deteriorate. Then they got the money.

INNOVATIVE PRICING

Giving people a "break" on the fare based on: frequency of travel, where they are traveling from or to, whether they have to cross two fare zones, or time of travel.

BUDGETARY UNCERTAINTIES

This means that transportation agencies never know exactly how much money they're going to get until they get it. This makes it difficult to plan service improvements, repairs, or keep fares down.

SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

Buses, subways, railroads should be safer, cleaner, more comfortable, faster, more frequent, and more efficient.

INTERMODALISM

One of the meanings of intermodalism is that the passenger shouldn't have to worry about whether he or she needs to take a bus, subway, train, or boat, in any combination, in order to reach a destination. If it's public transportation, you should buy 1 ticket, and leave the worrying about double fares, transfers, incompatible schedules, and bus stations that are separate from train stations to the public transportation agencies.

TRAFFIC CALMING

This is about using various techniques to keep automobile traffic reasonably slow, quiet, and generally unobtrusive -- to improve the experience of the pedestrian, and the general quality of life for residents. Traffic Calming tools include street design (winding streets or street bumps), lowering the speed limit, and enforcing noise control laws - as well as creating attractive and safe places to walk.

PEDESTRIAN ISSUES

A major example of pedestrian issues is Traffic Calming, described above. In general, the term Pedestrian Issues represents a philosophy that looks at all transportation issues from the point-of-view of the walker. An other example of approaching an issue from the Pedestrian Issues point-of-view would be to preserve waterfront areas - so that the community and people on foot could enjoy the area, rather than to just use it for a highway, or parking.

CONGESTION PRICING

This means finding ways to make the vehicles that cause congestion (traffic jams) pay the price of the congestion (increased air pollution, lost productivity (time wasted)).

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation is the focus of this entire guide. Recent Congressional legislation has made it mandatory that the public be included in the transportation planning process.