U.S. Department
of Transportation

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING UNDER ISTEA

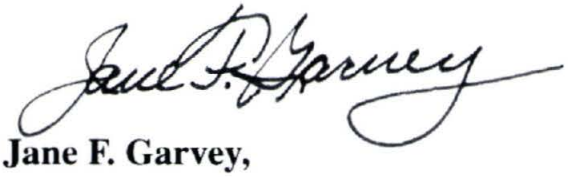
The Shape of Things to Come

A Note from the Administrators

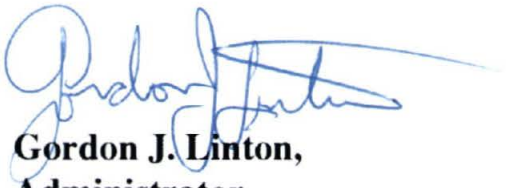
Enactment of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) marked a turning point in transportation for the United States. With completion of the Interstate Highway System near at hand and other transportation priorities growing in urgency, the need to adapt the Nation's transportation planning capabilities to meet future challenges had become crucial. ISTEA set the Nation's transportation planning on a new course—one which could lead to better performance of the entire transportation system through a greater emphasis on intermodal connections and strategic investment in existing infrastructure, new technologies, and targeted new construction. Highways and transit, bicycle paths and pedestrian walkways, movement of both people and freight—these essential elements needed to be linked together to enhance mobility for all Americans and sustain the country's role in the global economy.

ISTEA also embodied Americans' increased awareness of the need to improve air quality, protect the natural environment, and support the development and preservation of vibrant towns and cities. A key element of the strategy for meeting these goals involves strengthening the connection between transportation and land use planning. ISTEA encourages investment in transit and other transportation facilities that promote pedestrian activity, preserve open space, and enhance the character, safety, and vitality of local communities.

ISTEA served as a starting point on a journey toward the transportation future. Development and application of ISTEA concepts has required hard work, discipline, and vision by planning practitioners throughout the country, including an ever-expanding range of private citizens. The Federal Transit Administration and Federal Highway Administration have prepared this booklet, "Metropolitan Transportation Planning Under ISTEA: The Shape of Things to Come," to describe the progress that has been achieved through these efforts during the five years since ISTEA was adopted. These are the first steps in a process that is being shaped by experience and innovation, and which requires continuing leadership and commitment. Topics include Improved Investment Decisions, Working to Improve Environmental Quality, Indispensable Partnerships, and Service to Communities. We invite readers to review the information and examples presented herein as they contemplate ISTEA reauthorization and its implications for the future. This glimpse into the experience of the past five years conveys the promise of building on our current achievements as we consider the "shape of things to come."



Jane F. Garvey,
Acting Administrator
Federal Highway Administration



Gordon J. Linton,
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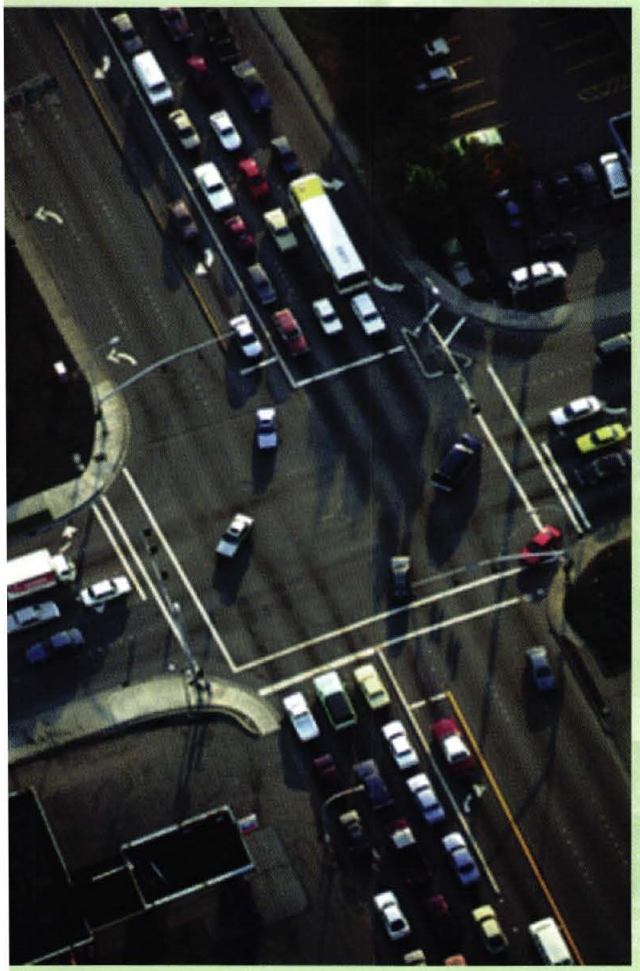
Introduction

As a new century draws near, the challenges of global competition, rapidly developing technologies, and soaring travel demand are testing the nation's capacity to move people and goods safely, economically and efficiently. At the same time, the prominence of transportation systems as a fixture in the modern landscape calls for rigorous management of transportation impacts to communities and the physical environment. In response to these challenges, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) draws upon the lessons learned from over two decades of transportation planning experience by state and local governments. The framework developed by ISTEA is leading to a new era of more productive and safer transportation systems, friendly to both the environment and communities.

Since the enactment of ISTEA, metropolitan areas have been working to develop a process of decision making that will serve all customers of the transportation system--travelers, businesses, and communities. State and local agencies are rethinking and reworking conventional approaches in accord with principles that support effective planning, including:

- *Realistic financial analysis, in which program costs and revenues are in balance.*
- *Preservation and efficient use of existing transportation facilities.*
- *Problem-solving through application of sound technical methods and technological options.*
- *Participatory decision-making by public agencies, businesses, community groups, private organizations, and individual citizens with a stake in the outcome of the planning process.*
- *Integration of highway, transit, Intelligent Transportation Systems, bicycles, and other modes into a cohesive transportation network.*
- *Full consideration of transportation impacts on such crucial quality of life factors as the economy, social conditions, and the natural environment.*
- *Availability of flexible funding to support multimodal decision-making.*



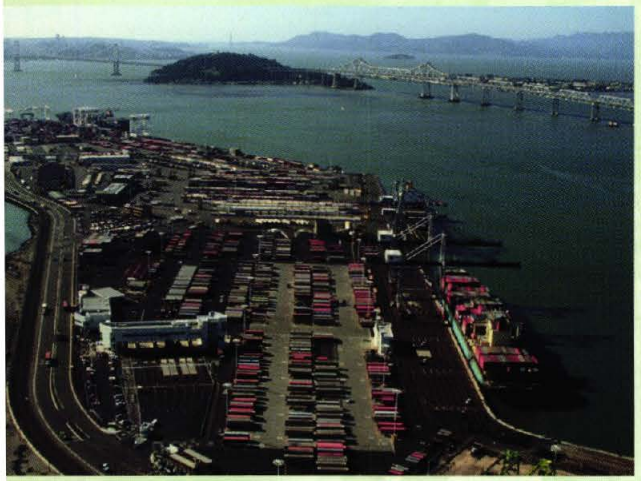
Recognizing the diversity of the nation's metropolitan areas, ISTEA encourages innovation and adaptation of sound planning practices to local conditions and priorities. State and local jurisdictions are the focal point for decision-making under ISTEA. Over the past five years, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have been working in partnership with state and local governments and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) to implement ISTEA's provisions. The results produced within this short period demonstrate significant progress, as reflected in the invigoration of metropolitan transportation planning as practiced by agencies throughout the nation. Examples of these advances range from widespread incorporation of improved financial planning in long-range plans and short-range investment programs, to strategic initiatives for engaging citizens in the planning process, to the fuller integration of air quality improvement as a goal of transportation planning.

FTA and FHWA have prepared this review of transportation planning progress to date based on information that has been collected from state and metropolitan agencies across the country. Corresponding to the key objectives addressed through state and metropolitan transportation planning, the review considers four major categories of results as focal points:

- Improved Investment Decisions - changes in investment strategies resulting from improved financial planning and systemwide analysis that integrates highways, transit, and other modes.
- Working to Improve Environmental Quality - consideration of air quality and other environmental impacts as an integral part of the planning process.
- Indispensable Partnerships - interagency cooperation and public involvement.
- Service to Communities - incorporation of local social, economic, and development objectives through the planning process.

The results reported in this review reflect the early positive efforts of state and metropolitan agencies to respond to the concepts advanced in ISTEA. As these initial steps suggest, the future holds the potential for even more far-reaching benefits, as the nation develops a transportation system equal to the challenges of a new century.

Improved Investment Decisions



"ISTEA's requirement that transportation plans and programs be constrained to available resources has dramatically changed the process for selecting and funding transportation improvements in our region -- we feel for the better." **Henry Wilson, Council member, City of Hurst, Texas, Chairman, Regional Transportation Council**

With ISTEA's encouragement, states and metropolitan areas are developing better processes for planning major transportation investments. In many areas, planning approaches reflect a growing emphasis on transportation as an integrated system of roadways, transit services, pedestrian and bicycle paths, ports, and airports. This perspective is helping areas move away from fragmented planning, where funding sources predetermine the types of investments that can be considered and information used in decision-making is inadequate to support the evaluation of a full range of relevant alternatives. To translate better investments from a concept into reality, ISTEA provides new funding flexibility for state and local governments to determine the most effective use of federal funds.

Instead of concentrating in isolation on operations of automobiles, trains, buses or other transportation modes, metropolitan areas are increasingly considering how a broad range of possible investments and strategies can best meet regional goals and solve problems. These strategies may link modes together to improve the efficiency of the regional transportation network or utilize technology to increase the capacity of existing facilities. In some areas, for example, planning agencies working together with private industry have determined that improved roadway access to ports can eliminate acute operational bottlenecks and significantly boost the capacity of the entire freight transportation system. Other areas find that better connections for airport passengers to buses or trains can be highly effective in improving transportation service.

As metropolitan areas gain experience in exploring an expanded range of investment options through the planning process, ISTEA's provisions for sound financial planning assure that the solutions considered are grounded in the reality of hard choices based on available resources. In the past, many regions adopted plans and investment programs without fully addressing the likely availability of funds. Important decisions were made outside the planning process, often without a sense of regional priorities.

Under ISTEA, the reality of budget constraints is central to transportation planning, including the development of each metropolitan area's long-range plan and short-range investment program. Fiscal planning communicates a sense of opportunity as well as limits, and makes it easier for planning agencies to be accountable for the accuracy and value of the information they generate. Improved financial planning enhances the role of the planning process as a source of vital information used by elected officials in making decisions. The discipline of constraining plans and programs to expected revenues also helps to integrate transportation and air quality planning, ensuring that funds are available to implement the transportation improvements needed to reduce pollution.

Metropolitan areas such as San Francisco are choosing to go one step beyond their official long-range plans by developing regional "vision" plans. Vision plans challenge policy makers and the public to consider the effects of different strategies and levels of funding on the future transportation system. The process of producing a vision plan can foster creative and critical thinking about crucial choices: for example, how best to balance the twin goals of revitalizing central cities and accommodating suburban growth. Innovative financing is explored in many of these plans as a means of bringing costs and revenues into balance.

The principles leading to better investment decisions apply not only to systemwide plans and programs, but also to potential capital improvements that become the building blocks of an integrated regional transportation

system. Where the planning process identifies a problem that suggests the possible need for a major infrastructure investment using Federal funds, such as adding freeway lanes or building a light-rail transit line, ISTEA encourages balanced consideration of a broad range of possible solutions, including highway, transit, and operational improvements. Metropolitan planning agencies in Salt Lake City, Miami, Dallas, St. Louis and other areas are developing major investment studies as collaborative efforts. Teams from all interested jurisdictions, including state departments of transportation, cities, transit operators, and planning agencies, work together to define solutions to transportation problems. Broad public participation in these studies increases the likelihood that key concerns will be addressed and that a recommended project will have the support necessary for successful implementation.

Solving Problems by Linking Modes -- Miami

In Miami, the East-West Corridor and Miami Intermodal Center (MIC) investment studies embrace the concept of intermodal planning. Investments recommended through these studies will connect various transportation modes together and to major commercial, residential and other activity centers. Explosive growth in population, tourism, and trade in the region promoted the development of the MIC concept and the interagency partnerships needed to bring different modes together. The MIC was envisioned as a transportation complex next to Miami International Airport, linking MetroRail, Tri-rail, Amtrak, the regional highway system, the port, and the airport. Passengers will move smoothly among all modes at the connection point linking services, which will increase the convenience of using transit. The shift of airport travelers from cars to transit will free limited highway capacity for the freight sector, which depends on extensive use of port and airport facilities.

The East-West Corridor project will connect the MIC to the center of Miami. The broad range of alternatives considered in conjunction with the MIC included highway and transit operational improvements; new general use and carpool lanes with express bus service; and highway operational improvements with new rail service. These studies demonstrate the potential of collaborative intermodal transportation planning to boost productivity by improving both passenger and freight service.

A Vital Role for Transportation Planning -- San Francisco Bay Area

Financial planning in the San Francisco Bay Area provides a regionwide foundation for transportation investment decisions. Rigorous forecasting of future funding is coupled with detailed analysis of present and future costs to ensure that adequate funds are available to run the existing system and implement new projects. All potential investments are considered in relation to their potential impact on the region's ability to build, operate, and maintain the entire transportation system. The project funding and selection process is open from the start, because the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the MPO in the San Francisco Bay Area, provides its partner local governments and project sponsors with the opportunity to review revenue assumptions. Jurisdictions enter the project screening and scoring process knowing what they can realistically expect in terms of funding. Working cooperatively with the region's partners has enabled the Commission to plan within a budget while at the same time ensuring local support for delivering the region's investment program.

Sound financial analysis helps the region establish priorities when considering both new investments and changes to the operation and maintenance of the existing system. Meeting national standards for healthy air quality, for example, is addressed as a priority need in budget deliberations. The process also allows the region to anticipate potential funding shortfalls and identify ways to meet those shortfalls before they occur. This information provides all participants in this complex region -- composed of more than 100 jurisdictions and over 20 transit operators -- a clear understanding of what funds are available to meet the metropolitan area's transportation needs today and tomorrow.

Working to Improve Environmental Quality

"The ISTEA program has directly benefitted the City of Everett in many ways. By successfully competing for funds through programs such as the Surface Transportation Program, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program, and Hazard Elimination Program, the City has been able to complete a wide variety of projects that have improved transportation and quality of life for Everett." **Edward D. Hansen, Mayor, City of Everett, Washington**

The impacts of transportation extend beyond measures of mobility, congestion, and access to essential characteristics of the physical environment. Transportation affects air quality, land use patterns, and local energy and land conservation efforts. By raising the profile of environmental issues in transportation, ISTEA fosters renewed sensitivity to environmental concerns as part of transportation decisions.

ISTEA is supporting efforts to improve air quality in areas which do not meet national air quality standards for ozone, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter. Enacted one year after the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA), these two laws have done more to integrate transportation and air quality planning than any previous legislation. Together, ISTEA and the CAAA encourage metropolitan areas to use a regional planning approach to address air quality concerns. Solutions are being forged at the regional level, with the MPO serving as a forum for coordinated and cooperative decision-making. Transportation planning agencies are working together with state and local environmental agencies and private interest groups to address air quality issues that often extend beyond the boundaries of a single community or the jurisdiction of a single agency. In Dallas, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Miami, Chicago and other areas, regional air quality councils and clean air partnerships are bringing together a wide range of agencies and private citizens to solve transportation and air quality problems.

A key provision of ISTEA linking transportation and air quality is the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program, serving as a dedicated funding source for transportation projects that improve air quality in areas not meeting national clean air standards. The CMAQ program authorizes approximately $1 billion annually for states, MPOs and local agencies targeted to fund a wide range of innovative programs and projects that can reasonably be expected to reduce air pollution. To date, many exemplary CMAQ-funded projects are being implemented across the country. Many of the projects that qualified for the CMAQ program based on their potential to reduce emissions also produce additional benefits that are important to communities, including enhanced mobility, economic development, and improved intermodal connections.

Interactions between transportation and the environment are not limited to air quality. ISTEA explicitly identifies the environment, land use, and energy conservation as planning factors to be considered in the development of state and metropolitan plans and programs. Benefits from early consideration of environmental values in the transportation planning process have long been recognized, but in the past, developing a planning process that provides for early integration of transportation and environmental objectives has been difficult to achieve. With the support of ISTEA, a number of states and metropolitan areas have made significant progress in meeting this challenge.

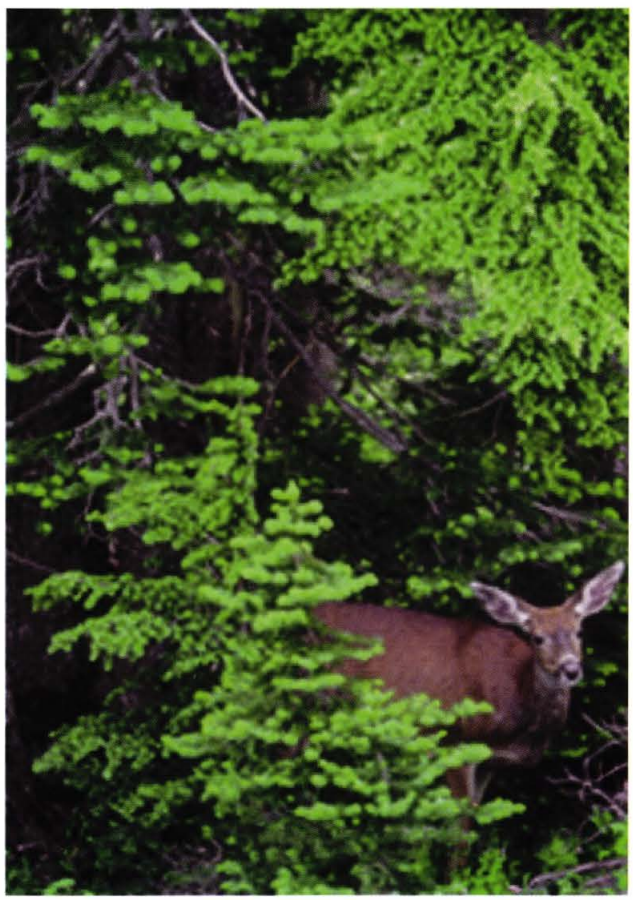
In North Carolina, the State Department of Transportation works with environmental resource agencies to identify issues of environmental concern at an early stage of systems planning, when environmental resource considerations can be addressed as an integral factor in the development of project alternatives. Timely coordination minimizes the potential for duplication of effort by transportation and environmental agencies and increases the likelihood that optimal solutions will emerge through the planning process. This "upstream" approach has resulted in other benefits as well, notably increased trust on the part of the

environmental community and the general public. The State Department of Transportation views this process as providing the best chance to preserve corridors for future transportation use and smooth the way for project development.

Another tangible way ISTEA is promoting environmental quality is through Transportation Enhancement activities. Transportation Enhancements are designed to foster the harmonious integration of transportation facilities into their natural settings, and include projects such as rail-to-trail conversions, bicycle and pedestrian improvements, restoration and preservation of historic buildings and structures, and scenic beautification. The Transportation Enhancements program has gained a strong following among environmental organizations and local community groups by making it possible to implement projects that had previous public support but lacked necessary funding. The program also has improved the planning process by bringing a host of "non-traditional" project sponsors and advocates to the table to discuss the best use of available funds. Once engaged in the planning process through an interest in Transportation Enhancement projects, many of these new participants become involved in a broader range of concerns, including the development of highway and transit goals and priorities.

Integrating Air Quality and Transportation Planning -- CMAQ

The availability of CMAQ funds has provided a major impetus for many areas to incorporate air quality impacts in their evaluation of potential projects and to implement projects that are sensitive to the environment. In New Jersey, criteria used to rank prospective improvements were recently revised by the MPO to give priority to projects that remove vehicles from the road and have measurable air quality benefits. The MPO also has begun to play a much bigger role in ensuring that air quality concerns are addressed in their long-range plan and short-range transportation investment program. In Chicago, CMAQ funds are programmed according to competitive criteria, which rank projects based on their potential to realize reductions in vehicle travel and emissions from transportation sources. Similarly, the Pennsylvania DOT and the Denver, Seattle, St. Louis and Los Angeles metropolitan areas also have utilized quantitative analysis to select the most cost-effective CMAQ projects.



Local Solutions to Environmental Challenges

The flexibility to spend transportation funds on environmentally-related transportation projects that are tailored to local conditions and priorities has received widespread support. Many areas have used CMAQ funds to implement innovative programs to better manage the use of transportation facilities, fund park and ride lots and transit station improvements, convert automotive fleets to alternative fuels, and improve freight movement. In New York City, where bicycles and pedestrians account for approximately 400,000 work trips on a typical day, the MPO has established a process which sets aside CMAQ and STP Enhancement funds for bicycle and pedestrian projects that otherwise might not be able to compete with other projects strictly on their potential to reduce emissions. New Jersey Transit used CMAQ funds for their "WHEELS" program, a package of new and non-traditional services such as reverse commute, which augment their fixed-route bus services. Other areas have emphasized energy conservation in approaching environmental enhancements. In Seattle, transit and ridesharing are used to promote energy conservation and environmental protection. Because of the high cost of fuel in Hawaii and the fact that the transportation sector is Hawaii's largest user of energy, the state energy office in Honolulu has linked energy conservation with transportation planning.

Linking Transportation and Land Use -- Northern New Jersey and Seattle

The impact of transportation on land use and the environment is also gaining recognition as many areas attempt to closely integrate long-range land use and transportation plans. In Northern New Jersey, an agreement between the Office of State Planning and local transportation implementing agencies links the transportation planning process to the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP). The SDRP's objectives for transportation infrastructure are to encourage the types of development that revitalize urban centers, minimize environmental impacts, promote opportunities for economic growth, and provide for safe and functional transportation access. In Seattle, the MPO has worked with local governments to link the regional transportation plan with growth management objectives and policies. The MPO has collaborated with local governments to develop a review process that ensures conformity of local transportation and land use plans with the regional transportation plan and VISION 2020, the region's long-range growth management, economic, and transportation strategy. VISION 2020 supports the concentration of growth in urban areas for the purpose of conserving open space and resource lands, including farmlands and forests.

Indispensable Partnerships

"A cooperative working partnership is essential for reaching decisions on broad investment strategies and on allocation of federal, state and local dollars for programs and projects." **Kirk Brown, Secretary, Illinois Department of Transportation**

The transportation system in metropolitan areas links workers to jobs, businesses to customers, and entertainment, education, and health care facilities to all. It also links together towns, cities, and counties within a metropolitan area and connects the metropolitan area to the rest of the country. Making these links requires the cooperation of many organizations within the metropolitan area. Cooperation occurs through partnerships that include local, state, and Federal governments, public and private organizations, and individuals.

Growing recognition of transportation as a regional system has promoted stronger partnerships among MPOs, state departments of transportation, and transit operators. ISTEA has encouraged a regional approach to transportation decision-making. The role of the MPO as a regional decision-making forum has been enhanced in many metropolitan areas to provide the regional cooperation necessary to move projects forward. Partnerships help to bring local governments together to address regional interests. Many of these partnerships have developed and evolved over time. Metropolitan areas also have established new methods to bring transportation agencies and other organizations together.

The public is a key partner in the planning process and ISTEA recognizes the crucial role of public involvement. Opportunities for public involvement should begin early in the planning process, from the formulation of objectives to the identification of alternative investments. Committees assembled to address specific transportation issues, such as freight movement or bicycle and pedestrian mobility, bring new perspectives to transportation planning and decision-making. The participation of groups organized around specific issues, such as environmental quality or economic development, helps to improve the link between transportation and other regional issues. Increased commitment to public involvement has encouraged metropolitan areas to undertake initiatives to expand the range of participants in the transportation planning and decision-making process. Many metropolitan planning agencies have undertaken special efforts to increase participation by the elderly, people with disabilities, low income residents, minorities, and others who traditionally have been underserved by transportation systems.

Building toward agreement in transportation planning requires active participation by individual citizens, businesses, and organizations that policies and investment decisions may affect. Participation from all these partners throughout the planning process is indispensable to the formulation of decisions that respond to public concerns. Broad popular support is what moves an idea for improving a metropolitan area's transportation system to a decision to invest in the improvement.

Freight Industry Identifies Improvement to the Regional Transportation System – San Francisco

ISTEA encourages metropolitan areas to consider all uses of the transportation system. The movement of freight within and through the metropolitan area is one of these uses, which in the past has often been overlooked during the planning process. To address freight movement needs, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission in San Francisco has established a Freight Advisory Council. The Council includes freight industry representatives from the entire metropolitan area. It has identified more than forty actions that would improve the movement of freight in the metropolitan area and has been involved in the development of criteria the metropolitan area uses for evaluating potential transportation investments. The work of the Council ensures that freight investments are considered on a level playing field with other transportation investments.

Involving and Informing the Public -- Seattle

In response to ISTEA, metropolitan planning agencies across the nation have worked to strengthen public involvement. The Puget Sound Council of Governments in the Seattle-Tacoma-Everett metropolitan area has adopted polices that reflect the region's tradition of openness in government and active citizen participation. A principle of the Council's public involvement program holds that "professionals do not have a monopoly on good solutions," and the Council seeks ideas and information from the public to complement the technical work of its staff. The Council engages the public's interest through outreach techniques that include workshops, open houses, roundtable discussions, and conferences. In support of this effort, the Council regularly provides information to the public through press releases, newspaper articles, a monthly newsletter, and briefings. Two videos produced by the Council provide a lively presentation of regional transportation issues oriented to the public. The Council also works in cooperation with private community and advocacy groups, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and freight handlers, who serve as active members of the Council's advisory committees.

Cooperative Forecasting Process Sets Baseline for Region -- Washington, DC

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments in the Washington, DC metropolitan area adopts a regional economic forecast every three to five years. This forecast, developed cooperatively by state and local governments throughout the region, serves as a guide for all regional planning, including transportation planning. The process used to adopt this forecast requires active participation by state and local governments. This provides a unifying element to decision-making at the city, county, and state level. The forecast is the starting point for regional transportation planning and an important link to other planning and decision-making processes.

Service to Communities

"Transportation is more than just connecting points on a map. It is about building stronger, self-sustaining communities and regions." **Francis G. Slay, President, Board of Aldermen, City of St. Louis, Missouri**

Transportation functions as a vital lifeline to communities. Since the earliest development of towns and cities, transportation services have been inextricably linked to progress and prosperity. The movement of people and goods, whether by river, sea, rail, or roadway, has always been essential to the commerce and social interaction that are at the heart of community life. Today, the need to accommodate escalating volumes of travel over rapidly expanding networks of activity complicates the task of developing transportation systems that promote the vitality of communities. Yet, the connection between transportation and its impacts on communities remains crucial, as reflected in such important considerations as the health of local economies, the preservation of neighborhoods, and the mobility of people who cannot use or afford private vehicles.

ISTEA has encouraged an approach to planning that emphasizes the role of transportation services in shaping the economy and social environment of communities. A basic principle of ISTEA is the need to address the economic and social effects of transportation plans and investments. This principle, long recognized as fundamental to sound planning practice, has become the subject of a renewed focus in the work of metropolitan planning agencies since the passage of ISTEA. With encouragement from ISTEA, transportation plans and programs are increasingly framing transportation decisions in relation to community goals, values, and priorities. In many areas around the country, investments reflect growing appreciation of transportation facilities as a feature of the community landscape and consideration of the role of transportation services in building and restoring communities.

The intrinsic connection between transportation and neighborhoods is the focus of the Department of Transportation's National Partnership for Transportation and Livable Communities, which builds on the principles embodied in ISTEA. The Livable Communities initiative encourages investment in transportation improvements that are sensitive to a community's need for both convenient and safe access to transportation service and a secure and attractive environment for pedestrians and area residents. Planning and decision-making for Livable Communities projects incorporate extensive grassroots involvement, ensuring that the local community controls the course of its own development. Livable Communities projects that are planned or in progress throughout the country demonstrate how thoughtful transportation and land use planning can be mutually supportive, creating facilities that are friendly to transportation system customers, pedestrians, and communities.

Another priority need that has been identified in many metropolitan areas is economic development through improved freight transportation capabilities. Cities and regions have long sought to attract businesses by developing seaports and airports. Encouraged by ISTEA's emphasis on the consideration of social and economic impacts, MPOs in regions such as New Orleans, San Francisco, Seattle, and Miami have become important participants in the enhancement of the roadways, rail systems, ports, and airports that compose regional freight networks. Experience in these regions illustrates that MPOs can provide forums for interested groups to develop coordinated regional freight strategies and negotiate a balance between community impacts and economic benefits of increased freight movement.

ISTEA also has provided an opportunity to broaden and redefine goals for the transportation system to better reflect community concerns. Many metropolitan areas have shifted the traditional focus on improving mobility away from simply moving traffic, asking what mobility means to an

individual community in terms of access to jobs, services and other community resources. The following examples illustrate how these changing perspectives can culminate in the development of projects and strategies that address community concerns, whether they be economic development, quality of life, or safety.

Freight & Neighborhoods: Achieving a Balance -- New Orleans

New Orleans is a gateway to the nation's inland waterways and a major hub for rail service between the nation's east and west coast ports. As such, freight movement is critical to the region's economic health. Since ISTEA, New Orleans' Regional Planning Council has reached out to the freight community to capitalize on possibilities for regional economic development. Shippers, freight carriers, and facility operators are active members of the Council's policy and advisory committees. At the same time, the Council has taken careful steps to ensure that freight movement needs do not overshadow broader community concerns. In particular, the Council supported the development of a port access route designed specifically to divert truck traffic away from residential communities. Through this action, the Council was able to improve safety and reduce noise in the neighborhood while expediting the movement of goods to and from the port of New Orleans. The Council also has joined with residents of another New Orleans neighborhood to produce a program mitigating the construction impacts of a major locks replacement project. The program responded to the interests and concerns expressed by the affected community, successfully reducing earlier opposition and building public support for the project.

"Bridges to Work" -- St. Louis

The East-West Gateway Coordinating Council in St. Louis stresses the intrinsic connection between transportation and its economic and social function in communities. Central to the Council's approach is its work in developing partnerships with community-based organizations and other citizens who have a stake in transportation decisions. In preparing its recent regional transportation plan, East-West Gateway undertook a special effort to include minority groups and the transit dependent, in addition to representatives of the trucking, air transport, and rail industries. This process had a significant effect on the mix of projects included in the plan.

Outreach efforts to low income residents have evolved into a process aimed at improving access to employment and other opportunities for inner-city residents. These efforts include an interagency "Bridges to Work" initiative linking transportation with workforce and economic development in a series of cooperative projects, and TRACER (Transportation Corridor for Economic Renewal), a strategic capital improvement plan in the MetroLink light rail corridor, implemented in conjunction with the Missouri Department of Economic Development.

Addressing Local Priorities -- Northern New Jersey

Working through its active involvement in the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, a local county successfully built support and acquired funding for rail upgrades contributing to economic development and improved air quality. The county proposed the purchase of two rail lines adjacent to 3,000 acres of industrial land, recognizing an opportunity to offer businesses an alternative to "truck only" operations in an already congested metropolitan area. The MPO awarded the project funds based on recently broadened project selection criteria, which took into account the project's impact in removing vehicles from the road and improving air quality. The rail alternative is expected to eliminate 60 truck trips per day and alleviate further congestion of local roadways. Based on the promise of rail upgrades, a manufacturing company invested in the county, resulting in 450 new jobs.

Conclusion

Recognizing the pervasive influence of transportation on the quality of life, Congress passed the landmark surface transportation legislation known as ISTEA. ISTEA encourages changes in transportation planning that will produce a better transportation system -- more efficient in its operations and more compatible with a healthy environment and thriving communities. Under ISTEA, transportation investments are the product of a planning process that takes into account the perspectives of all users of the transportation system, from local businesses and industry to commuters and neighborhoods.

ISTEA is a work in progress, and five years following its enactment there is evidence that the legislation is helping to strengthen the transportation planning process, producing better and more informed investment decisions. Changes are gradually emerging as metropolitan planning agencies (MPOs, state departments of transportation, and transit operators) cooperatively reconsider traditional approaches in response to ISTEA principles. Strategies and projects take many years, often decades, to develop before they are ready for implementation. Investments being implemented or completed today may have preceded ISTEA by many years. Ultimately, the impact of emerging changes in the planning process will have to be judged by the quality and impact of transportation investments and policies.

Are local needs and preferences of communities being better served? Do transportation systems support a quality environment? Do they meet local, regional and national needs for mobility and access, supporting economic growth and social progress? Does the planning process produce better analysis, leading to more informed local decisions? These are the tests of ISTEA. In addressing the scarcity of public resources, ISTEA was designed to provide more flexibility for local jurisdictions to develop solutions that make sense in their areas. What works in New York does not necessarily fit St. Louis, and freight improvements in New Orleans may have little benefit if forced on Salt Lake. Metropolitan areas across the country are building on the foundation of ISTEA and providing evidence of beneficial change:

- A growing sentiment has emerged among planning practitioners that realistic financial planning is the cornerstone of improved investment decisions. Consideration of budget constraints encourages serious assessment of priorities and strategic thinking about funding allocation and financing options. As a result, the planning process gains credibility and influences decision-making.

- Greater emphasis on air quality and other environmental impacts of transportation has produced a wide range of improvements supporting pollution reduction and greater integration of transportation systems with the natural environment. Metropolitan areas are investing in transit, ridesharing programs, bicycle facilities, and improved traffic operations based on their ability to improve both mobility and air quality. Similarly, pedestrian, bicycle, landscaping, and amenity improvements are being implemented to enhance the compatibility of transportation within its physical surroundings. Possibly the most important development to date, however, is increased collaboration between transportation and related agencies, including air quality agencies, working toward common goals, and expansion of the range of participants in the transportation planning process. These organizational changes are serving as a catalyst for continued progress, as transportation becomes part of the solution to regional air quality problems.

- Planning is creating a better decision context for addressing the realities of project implementation and transportation operations, as agencies and the public work together in partnership. Metropolitan planning organizations are more effective as a result of improved channels of communication and cooperative relationships established

with state and local governments, businesses, and private citizens. Public involvement in the planning process is informing planners how transportation can best serve its customers and be a good neighbor. In a number of metropolitan areas, expanded public involvement has produced a change in the mix of projects and objectives included in regional transportation plans.

The participation of neighborhood associations, private industry groups, and other citizens concerned about the quality of life in communities is shaping the priorities of planning organizations. The goal of improved mobility is evolving to address such considerations as accessibility to jobs and other critical resources, economic development, preservation of local commercial centers and neighborhoods, and transportation safety. This perspective is helping to produce a variety of transit, roadway, and pedestrian improvement projects that support strong communities.

Taken together, these changes represent real progress, but much remains to be done. Where we go from here will depend in large part on discussions currently underway regarding reauthorization of ISTEA in 1997. In the five years since its passage, ISTEA has succeeded in bringing into clearer focus the role of transportation in contributing to the nation's overall well being, and in enhancing the ability of local officials and citizens to shape tomorrow's transportation system. Continued progress is critical if decision makers are to make prudent choices that meet the needs of the 21st century.

Additional information regarding ISTEA and the metropolitan planning process may be obtained from the following sources:

Federal Transit Administration
Office of Public Affairs
Room 9400
400 7th St., S.W.
Washington, DC 20590

Federal Highway Administration
Office of Public Affairs
Room 4218
400 7th St., S.W.
Washington, DC 20590

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