



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

James L. Oberstar
Chairman

Washington, DC 20515

John L. Mica
Ranking Republican Member

David Heymsfeld, Chief of Staff
Ward W. McCarragher, Chief Counsel

James W. Coon II, Republican Chief of Staff

September 17, 2008

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members of the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
FROM: Subcommittee on Highways and Transit Staff
SUBJECT: Hearing on "Transportation Planning"

PURPOSE OF HEARING

The Subcommittee on Highways and Transit is scheduled to meet on Thursday, September 18, 2008, at 10:00 a.m., in room 2167 of the Rayburn House Office Building to receive testimony on the transportation planning process. This hearing is part of the Subcommittee's effort to prepare for the reauthorization of federal surface transportation programs under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users ("SAFETEA-LU"), which expires on September 30, 2009. The Subcommittee will hear from the mayor of a large city, a Deputy Secretary for Transportation Planning for a State department of transportation, an Executive Director and a Transportation Director for two different metropolitan planning organizations, a Planning Director for a mid-size city, and the Chair of the Executive Board of a multi-state transportation coalition.

BACKGROUND

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 (P.L. 87-866) required Federally-funded highway projects in urban areas to flow from metropolitan transportation planning processes (currently codified at 23 U.S.C. 134-135). Two years later, the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-365) established similar metropolitan planning requirements for transit projects seeking Federal funds (currently codified at 49 U.S.C. 5303-5306). In these early acts, Congress encouraged the development of transportation systems embracing various modes of transportation by directing States to implement the "3C" planning process for metropolitan areas — a process that is continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative. A decade later, the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973

(P.L. 93-87) required States to dedicate a small portion of the federal transportation funds they received to metropolitan planning activities.

Parallel statewide transportation planning requirements, however, did not exist until 1991. The Intermodal Surface Transportation and Efficiency Act ("ISTEA") created the statewide transportation planning processes and funding mechanisms that are still used today. ISTEA also greatly strengthened the role that metropolitan planning organizations ("MPOs") play in planning transportation projects by requiring that both long-range and short-term plans be fiscally constrained. In short, the legislation envisioned that the planning process should be a forum, developed with public input, for prioritizing multi-modal transportation decision-making in a variety of ways. Recognizing the important impact transportation infrastructure has on economic development and quality of life, the planning process provides the contexts for reconciling State and regional transportation needs and Federal transportation goals with proposed transportation projects and activities.

State Departments of Transportation ("State DOTs") and, in metro areas with populations above 50,000, MPOs conduct the transportation planning process. All highway and transit projects seeking federal funding must be included in the regional long-range transportation plan, the short-term transportation improvement plan ("TIP"), and the approved Statewide Transportation Improvement Program ("STIP").

MPOs are charged with developing Metropolitan Transportation Plans and TIPs. The Metropolitan Transportation Plan reflects the long-range intermodal vision for the metropolitan planning area, and is updated at least every four years in air quality nonattainment and maintenance areas, or at least every five years in air quality attainment areas. The TIP is a four-year project-specific document. The TIP is updated at least every four years. The projects contained in the TIP are to be consistent with the metropolitan transportation plan.

State DOTs are responsible for conducting the statewide transportation planning process, in consultation with MPOs, non-metropolitan local officials with responsibility for transportation, and tribal governments and Federal land management agencies. Statewide planning products include Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plans and STIPs. The Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan reflects the long-range intermodal vision (20 years minimum) for the State, and is to be updated periodically. The STIP provides a project-specific document that covers four years, and is updated at least every four years. Projects contained in the STIP are to be consistent with the long-range statewide transportation plan, metropolitan transportation plans, and TIPs.

In carrying out the transportation planning process, State DOTs and MPOs undertake a number of activities, including:

- Monitoring existing conditions;
- Forecasting future population and employment growth, including assessing projected land uses in the region and identifying major growth corridors;
- Identifying current and projected future transportation problems and needs and analyzing, through detailed planning studies, various transportation improvement strategies to address those needs;
- Developing long-range plans and short-range programs of alternative capital improvement and operational strategies for moving people and goods;

- Estimating the impact of recommended future improvements to the transportation system on environmental features, including air quality; and
- Developing a financial plan for securing sufficient revenues to cover the costs of implementing strategies.¹

ISTEA created linkages between transportation planning and other societal goals by developing eight specific factors MPOs and State DOTs are to consider in developing transportation plans. These include:

- support economic vitality;
- increase safety of transportation system;
- increase security of transportation system;
- increase accessibility and mobility options for people and freight;
- protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve quality of life, and consistency between transportation improvements and land use and economic development patterns;
- enhance system integration and connectivity;
- promote efficient system management and operation; and
- preservation of the existing transportation system.

CHALLENGES AND EMERGING THEMES IN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Freight Transportation Planning

The surface transportation network plays a critical role in national, regional and local economic activities. The growth in international trade and advances in logistics have increased the importance of the efficient operation and performance of the surface transportation network. Since 1970, imports to the U.S. have more than tripled as a share of GDP, while exports have more than doubled. The Department of Transportation estimates that by 2020 the nation's freight tonnage is projected to increase nearly 70 percent².

State DOTs and MPOs are responsible for considering freight movement during the transportation planning process; however, freight improvement projects often have difficulty entering the project programming phase.³ The current planning process charges agencies with focusing on addressing needs and issues within their areas of jurisdiction. Although freight mobility and access is one of the factors to be address in the planning process, in practice, freight projects have difficulty competing with other projects.

A 2003 the Government Accountability Office ("GAO") report found similar difficulties in programming freight related projects.

¹ U.S. Department of Transportation, "The Transportation Planning Process: Key Issues" 2007.

² "Freight in America: A New National Picture." U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovation Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics. January 2006.

³ "Integrating Freight into Transportation Planning and Project-Selection Processes." National Cooperative Highway Research Program Web-only Document 112. March 2007.

The fundamental limitation to overcoming freight mobility challenges is that the public-sector process at the state and local levels for planning and financing transportation improvements is not well suited to address freight projects. On the planning side, consideration of freight improvement projects as part of the local planning process is limited because the process is oriented to projects that clearly produce public benefits, such as passenger-oriented projects. While freight projects also may produce public benefits by reducing freight congestion, generally, public planners are wary of providing public support for projects that directly benefit the private sector.⁴

A key factor in the difficulty to advance freight-related projects, and one of the challenges facing planners, is how best to account for the benefits of these projects. The local jurisdiction is faced with the cost of the congestion due to freight movement and the cost of the freight-related improvement projects. Advancing these investments, however, also have regional and national benefits. Multi-jurisdictional coalitions—such as the I-95 Corridor Coalition—have become involved in pursuing and coordinating freight-related projects that cannot be easily addressed under the current planning process.

Regional and National Transportation Planning

Federal highway and transit law outline the processes for transportation planning on the metropolitan level and at the state level. While some large metropolitan areas stretch across two or more state boundaries, federal laws and regulations regarding transportation planning do not focus on transportation strategies that are regional or national in nature. Further, large metro areas often merge MPOs into more general-purpose councils which affect the degree of influence MPOs have on regional transportation planning.

Today's transportation challenges often have impacts beyond state and local borders. Congestion in and around our Nation's largest ports prevent imported goods from being delivered in a timely manner across the country. Railroad congestion in the Chicago area will impact goods being shipped from California to New York. As such, strategies to reduce rail congestion in Chicago may require projects to address bottlenecks both inside and outside of the Chicagoland region.

While States and MPOs have planning tools at their disposal to address local and statewide transportation problems, solutions to regional and national transportation challenges will often involve projects stretching across many states and metropolitan areas. Solutions to relieve congestion on the I-95 corridor may include improvements on highway corridors in adjacent states as a way to encourage people to use those corridors instead of I-95. While some States and MPOs have strengthened their regional planning capacity, greater collaboration at the regional level is needed to fully address the national nature of the surface transportation system.

⁴ GAO-04-165 "Freight Transportation: Strategies Needed to Address Planning and Financing Limitations." December 2003.

The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Commission (“Commission”) stated that the surface transportation programs cannot fully contribute to economic growth, international competitiveness, or other national goals without a national transportation strategy.

Land Use and Transportation Planning

According to DOT, land use and transportation are symbiotic: development density and location influence regional travel patterns and, in turn, the degree of access provided by the transportation system can influence land use and development trends. Thus, choosing a land-use strategy that complements a region’s transportation goals is an important part of the planning process. As the United States is projected to add 120 million new residents by 2050, the amount of new and rehabilitated infrastructure that will be necessary to support this magnitude of population growth will hinge largely on the priorities developed during the transportation planning processes.

One of the eight factors metropolitan and statewide transportation planning processes consider is consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns, but the level of involvement of state DOTs and MPOs in land use decision-making varies according to state and local legislation and policies. Some states and localities heavily integrate transportation and land use, such as those metropolitan areas that have adopted urban growth and transportation boundaries, promote transit-oriented development, and employ context sensitive design. At the other end of the spectrum, some states have constitutional and statutory constraints which limit the scope of planning agencies to work across jurisdictional lines.

The Commission has found that, overall, current transportation and land use policies are not well coordinated. This, they report, undermines national security, energy, and environmental goals by contributing to greater reliance on foreign petroleum, higher greenhouse gas emissions, and adverse public health impacts. They note that various land use choices, including density, mix of uses, contiguity of development, scale of activities and transportation and land use configuration all influence travel behavior. Although the magnitude of the impact and the political and market acceptance of initiatives to leverage these aspects of development so as to minimize vehicle miles traveled and travel demand in the future remain in dispute, the choices made in these areas in the future can significantly improve the attractiveness of alternative to solo driving.

Performance Standards in Transportation Planning

As the Committee approaches the reauthorization of the nation’s surface transportation laws, various studies, proposals and reports have suggested that adding performance standards to the highway and transit programs would build accountability and strengthen transparency. The transportation planning process is one area where performance standards could be included. State DOTs and MPOs could be required to maintain information systems that annually measure progress on indicators and outcomes of national significance and incorporate the results into the planning process. State DOTs and MPOs could also be required to evaluate projects using cost-benefit analyses.

The Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) recently released a study on performance measures in transportation planning. It suggested that an expanded list of performance indicators

could include: financial transparency; efficient land use; transportation choice and mode share; energy efficiency; health impacts; and environmental impacts.

The Commission recommends that future regional plans be developed to meet specific performance standards, and major projects would have to be shown to be cost-beneficial. The Commission recommends that planning activities continue to be funded through a percentage of the total authorized funding for the Federal surface transportation program.

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

On January 17, 2008, and February 13, 2008, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure met to hear testimony on the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission Report: "Transportation for Tomorrow", which focuses in part on the need to reform the current transportation planning processes.

On April 9, 2008, the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit held a hearing regarding transportation challenges for metropolitan areas.

On April 24, 2008, the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit held a hearing regarding freight movement on the surface transportation system.

On June 24, 2008, the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit held a hearing regarding connecting communities and the role of the surface transportation network in moving people and freight.

WITNESS LIST

The Honorable John W. Hickenlooper
Mayor
Denver, CO

Mr. James Ritzman
Deputy Secretary for Transportation Planning
Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
Harrisburg, PA

Mr. Andrew Chesley
Executive Director
San Joaquin Council of Governments
Stockton, CA

Mr. Charles Howard
Transportation Planning Director
Puget Sound Regional Council
Seattle, WA

Mr. Keith Selman, AICP
Planning Director
City of Laredo
Laredo, TX

Mr. Neil Pederson
Chair, Executive Board
I-95 Coalition
Baltimore, MD