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TRANSPORTATION, THE ISTEA, AND AMERICAN CITIES

from the STPP Monograph Series

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1. INTRODUCTION

For forty years, American cities and towns have had to live with the unintended consequences of transportation policies not guided by concepts of community, equity, and quality of life, but rather driven by a decision making paradigm which unconsciously assumed, a priori, that transportation is somehow a value free instrumentality of people's desire to get from A to B, no questions asked. Since the Interstate era began in 1956, transportation has been viewed by planners and politicians alike as being primarily, often entirely, a matter of supporting the economy.

Transportation planning methodologies, models and data have been developed which focus almost exclusively on "the work trip," notwithstanding the fact that today the simple homeworkhome trip chain accounts for a mere 14.1% of all person trips. Remarkably, nonwork trips now account for 70.0% of all person trips; transportation planningand decision makingmethodologies have barely even scratched the surface of what, in effect, is more than twothirds of the transportation "consumer market."

In effect, large portions of our societye.g. our central cities, the elderly, the poor, women with both job and family responsibilitieshave been consigned to the backwaters of transportation policy and decision making. Across the United States, transportation investment strategies have combined with discriminatory housing practices and Federal tax policies to create metropolitan areas with economically robust suburbs surrounding sick and decaying urban cores.

What's more, we're about to repeat this human and ecological disaster as older suburbs are deserted in favor of ever more sprawlingand auto dependentexurbs. According to Neil Pierce,

"Many working class suburbs are in severe decline. Analyzing 1992 census data from six representative metropolitan regions, Paul Glastris of U.S. News and World Report found that 35 percent suffered declines in median household incomes in the 1980's.

`Many suburbs that have served for decades as stepping stones for the working class found themselves in the same downward spiral as urban areas,' Glastris reported.

Real estate consultant Charles Lockwood, as quoted by Glastris, puts it more starkly: "The nation that invented the throwaway city is now creating the throwaway suburb."

America's transportation policies since the dawn of the Interstate era, and the land use patterns and urban forms which they helped spawn, have had visible, astronomical but oddly dissociated fiscal and human costs.

For example, highway advocates perpetuate the myth that the gasoline tax pays the "full cost" of building and maintaining the Nation's highways, streets and roads. But even moderate estimates of the true cost would put the per gallon gasoline tax in the range of \$3.00 to \$4.00 per gallon (similar to what it is in Europe). In 1992, American motorists burned 110 billion gallons of gasoline. This gives some insight as to the enormity of the hidden subsidies involved.

James J. MacKenzie of the World Resources Institute estimates that the total market, external and motor vehicle accident costs not borne by users could be as high as \$355.7 billion per year, a number consistent with the range implied by the previous paragraph.

In addition, if our Nation's metropolitan sprawl continues unabated, an assortment of additional hidden costs will continue to accrue on the Nation's public and personal ledgers. Here's how it works (and has been working for over forty years):

Start with the "American dream," the stand alone, single family home. Where is land cheap and taxes low? At the fringes of the metropolitan area. How do we get there? Not a problem, the state Department of Transportation will build or widen a freeway using taxes collected from urban, suburban and rural citizens alike. This is Hidden Cost No. 1.

Developers, having received the benefit in terms of publicly provided access, then get the benefit of Hidden Cost No. 2 as people buy the developers' relatively affordable homes, made more affordable by the Federal mortgage tax deduction. In fact, the postwar suburban boom was largely fueled by another huge Federal subsidy the VA loan program.

The same developers then develop suburban business parks, made possible by publicly funded beltway and suburban interstates.

But as people begin to populate the urban fringe, they demand public services, and highway infrastructure is only a small portion of the total cost of development that impacts a region. Providing services such as local roads, fire and police protection, water, sewer, and schools to sprawling suburban locations creates Hidden Cost No. 3.

Typically, these costs are borne by people already there, not by the new arrivees. Remember that area goes up with the square of the radius: the typical metropolitan area in the midwestern United States is only slightly larger now than it was twenty years ago

in terms of people, but is often two or three times as big in terms of settled land area. The economics are unavoidable.

As the urban core is abandoned, and as transportation linkages between where poor people live and where the jobs are become ever more tenuous, the undeniable costs of an unbroken cycle of poverty, unemployment, crime, and dependence on public assistance is Hidden Cost No. 4, and it is borne by everyone.

In fact, H. V. Savitch and his colleagues at the University of Louisville School of Urban Policy, in a comprehensive study of the relationship between center cities and their suburbs, concluded that selfsufficiency of suburbs "is an impoverished idea." They go on to say: "Suburbs which surround healthy cities stand a better chance of vitality than those that surround sick cities. Suburbanites may feel that they can shield themselves from urban decline, but like the hole wearing at the center of a rubber raft, everybody is likely to ride a little lower in the water." This might be called Hidden Cost No. 5, and it would appear to be borne by the suburbanites themselves.

Finally, people need to get to jobs, shopping, and social and recreational destinations. Because public transit hasn't figured out a way to work very well in low density suburbs, there is but one choice: the automobile. Because of our low urban densities, fuel consumption in American cities is about five times higher than in European cities, and the annual cost of congestion per capita in our major metropolitan areas has been estimated by the Texas Transportation Institute to be as much as \$650. That's Hidden Cost No. 6, and there are probably others.

And so it goes. The end result is metropolitan areas with a torn social fabric, with their sense of community atomized, with the poor and minorities relegated to a decaying urban core, and with cardependent suburbs sinking deeper into a cultural and spiritual malaise.

Transportation didn't do all that by itself, but it certainly helped. The question now is: what's to be done to reverse these trends, and how will America settle the 80 million new people it will have by the year 2020?

Ironically, involvement in transportation by institutions whose primary concern is empowering and assisting people and communities in our cities has been mostly peripheral. Social service agencies, health care providers, charitable organizations, community activists, and philanthropic foundations seem to have accepted the notion that the transportation system is a constraint to be coped with, not a potential asset to help carry out their primary missions.

Yet apart from entitlement programs, surface transportation is the Nation's largest domestic spending program at over \$100 billion per year. Is it unreasonable to expect if not require that our Nation's transportation policies and investments be harnessed to help address some of our most pressing social problems?

2. WHAT THE ISTEA DOES AND DOESN'T DO

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 broke important new ground by envisioning an approach to transportation planning, programming and funding in which people and communities matter, by attempting to move away from the traditional strategy of simply accommodating increases in vehicular demand, and by underscoring the importance of meaningfully addressing questions of social equity, economic efficiency, environmental and aesthetic degradation, energy conservation, and impact on quality of life and community livability.

The hallmarks of this new approach may be found in the ISTEA's "Declaration of Policy" (2), the very first paragraph of which states: "It is the policy of the United States to develop a National Intermodal Transportation System that is economically efficient, environmentally sound, provides the foundation for the Nation to compete in the global economy, and will move people and goods in an energy efficient manner. "

The ISTEA articulates a new vision not only of the positive contributions which transportation can make to the economy, but also of a new transportation decision making paradigm premised on the idea of synergistic, rather than antagonistic, linkages among goals of economic productivity, environmental protection, access and mobility, and revitalization of our Nation's urban and rural communities.

The ISTEA provides new "levers" by which concerned citizens, advocacy groups, local governments, and other interested parties can have an impact on whether and how transportation can be a positive force for change in our cities, our communities, and in the lives of the American people. Among these levers are:

Public Participation: one of the cornerstones of the ISTEA is increased public participation in the transportation planning process. What has traditionally passed as "citizen involvement" has been a generally superficial process whereby the people whose lives are most impacted are haphazardly brought in, usually fairly late in the game, and given little if any chance of understanding, evaluating, and expressing preferences for a meaningful diversity of options in full light of their transportation, environmental, and community impacts. The intent in the ISTEA is to develop participatory planning process mechanisms to a point where citizens can understand, evaluate, and express preferences for a meaningful diversity of modal and capital vs. noncapital intensive alternatives in full light of their transportation, environmental, and community impacts. These processes and the bewildering array of acronyms that go with them provide a principal point of access for concerned citizens and interest groups who want to weigh in on transportation policy, planning, project and funding decisions.

A Holistic Approach to Planning: The ISTEA's metropolitan and state planning requirements embrace a holistic approach to transportation planning wherein the concepts of system performance must be expanded to include mobility and access (to jobs, health care, cultural and recreational opportunities, etc.), reliability, security, social equity, and impact on the environment and quality of life. Table 1 shows the factors which ISTEA requires state DOTs and MPOs to take into account when developing state

and metropolitan transportation plans. Two additional factors civil rights and impacts on the central city have since been added by regulation.

Emphasis on Safety and Security: for decades, the carnage on our Nation's highways has been one of the ongoing tragedies of American life; and every day, millions of city dwellers pay the psychological and emotional price of riding transit systems where personal safety and security is anything but assured. In numerous ways, the ISTEA challenges the transportation community to redouble its efforts to redress these glaring deficiencies.

Emphasis on Aesthetics: within the Surface Transportation Program (STP)(Title 23, 133, U.S.C.), the ISTEA establishes a 10% setaside (\$2.39 billion over six years) for "transportation enhancement activities" which include: provision of facilities for pedestrians and bicycles; acquisition of scenic easements and historic sites; landscaping and other scenic beautification; historic preservation, control and removal of outdoor advertising, archaeological planning and research; and mitigation of water pollution due to highway runoff.

Flexibility: the ISTEA gives state and local officials unprecedented flexibility in moving Federal funds between modes, underscoring the idea that the Nation's transportation investment portfolio should be premised on economic, social, and environmental policy objectives cited above and should not be arbitrarily constrained by Federal designations. Over \$70 billion, or roughly 58% of the funds contained in the highway title of the ISTEA, have some degree of flexibility to be used for transit or other purposes. These programs include: the Surface Transportation Program (STP); the Congestion Management and Air Quality Program (CMAQ); "Minimum Allocation" and "Donor State Bonus"; Interstate Maintenance; Bridge Program; National Highway System (under specified circumstances); and Substitute Highway Funds of the Interstate Substitute Program.

It is extremely important to remember, however, the "flexing" of funds just doesn't happen. Rather, it is the result of effective and aggressive advocacy by proponents of alternative transportation modes.

The ISTEA seeks to change the direction of transportation decisionmaking in America by setting up a planning and decision making paradigm which invites indeed, welcomes a diverse array of stakeholders to get involved and stay involved in deciding how transportation can play a meaningful part in addressing the problems of marginalized citizens and communities.

But the ISTEA only sets the stage and puts the institutional machinery in place. This new vision of transportation as an instrument of social policy will not, indeed cannot, just happen. Wishing will not make it so. The ISTEA puts in place the framework for a new vision of transportation in America, but it is only the first step in a very, very long journey.

It's worth noting that the transportation "pipeline" is a long one. State and metropolitan transportation plans currently being developed have, at minimum, a 20 year time frame. Although there are lots of opportunities to make a difference in the near term, anyone who wants to have a say on how transportation is going to affect the lives of Americans in the 21st century needs to get involved now.

Transportation decision making processes have barely scratched the surface of opportunity for making significant, positive contributions to improving the quality of life in America's cities. The biggest challenge ahead is the development of an informed and empowered group of urban citizens and officials who offer an alternate vision for transportation and community. Reform can take root only by the formation and mobilization of broadbased coalitions which include neighborhood groups, social and human services organizations, business, environmentalists, and elected officials.

The readers of this paper are challenged to join in the effort to seize the opportunity provided by the ISTEA to reverse forty years of neglect and oversight, and to help achieve an American transportation future where people are the ultimate bottom line.

3. ON THE CUTTING EDGE

Across the Nation, transportation planning agencies, citizen activists, elected officials, and transportation service providers are already working to realize the vision of the ISTEA. The following are but a few examples:

In Washington, D.C., the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) is a coalition of over 100 groups founded in 1990 to ensure that transportation policy and investments help conserve energy, protect environmental and aesthetic quality, strengthen the economy, promote social equity, and make communities more livable. STPP emphasizes the needs of people, rather than vehicles, in assuring access to jobs, services and recreational opportunities. The work of STPP is made possible by grants from the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the Energy Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the James C. Penney Foundation, and the Surdna Foundation, Inc.

For more information, contact:

Hank Dittmar, Executive Director

Laura Olsen, Grass Roots Coordinator

Chris Bender, Mobility Partners Program

2029393470

In Chicago, the Center for Neighborhood Technology and the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group formed a coalition to protest the closing of a rapid transit line on the City's west side. After convincing the Chicago Transit Authority to rehabilitate the Green Line, the coalition engaged an architect to master plan 6 innercity station sites for mixed use, pedestrianoriented development. The project won ISTEA Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Program funding. A case study on the project is available from STPP (2029393470).

For more information, contact:
Jacky Grimshaw at CNT 3122784800 or
Howard Greenwich at NCBG 3129397198.

In St. Louis, the EastWest Gateway Coordinating Council, the MPO for the St. Louis region, has joined with dozens of community activists, neighborhood leaders, public officials and socialservice providers throughout the St. Louis region to develop strategies for community mobility which embrace the concepts of social responsibility and social independence. A number of local initiatives have resulted, and are summarized in the report, "From Poverty to Mobility: Community Solutions."

For more information, contact:
Blair Forlaw, EastWest Gateway Coordinating Council, 3144214220.

In Portland, Oregon, the Portland City Council has accepted the program, "Reclaiming Our Streets: Community Action Plan to Calm Neighborhood Traffic." The Plan was developed by over 100 volunteers in the Portland area and has been endorsed by neighborhood activists, safety and human services personnel, disabled advocates and minority community representatives. The Plan is a localized component of a broadbased regional effort to create a more livable Portland, including rationalization of land use, air quality and transportation issues.

For more information, contact:
Bureau of Traffic Management, Portland Office of Transportation, 1120 SW 5th Avenue, Suite 730, Portland, Oregon 97204; or, Ask for STPP's case study on Portland's Livable Downtown (2029393470).

In Washington, D.C., the Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities (WRN) was founded in 1992 as "an association of organizations, coalitions, and individuals advocating transportation investments and urban forms that are efficient, promote communities, and protect the land, air, environment and quality of life in the National Capital Region." WRN has developed a report, "The New Approach," which contains a new vision and specific measures to encourage balanced growth and sensible transportation choices.

For more information, contact:
Kristin Pauly, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, 4102688816.

In Maine, the state has made a radical shift in its approach to transportation decision making since the passage in 1991 of a referendum to stop the widening of the Maine Turnpike and to create a "Sensible Transportation Policy" for the state. The Policy requires the state to examine environmental, energy and social considerations in the longterm transportation planning process. The referendum was approved thanks to the volunteer efforts which started by gathering more than 80,000 signatures to put the referendum on the ballot. Since then, there has been a shift away from nonroad construction projects which is unprecedented in the state's history. STPP's case study on Maine can be obtained by calling 2029393470.

For more information, contact:

Bruce Hammond, Natural Resources Council of Maine, 2076223101, or,
John Duncan, Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee, 2077749891.

In California, the Local Government Commission (LGC) in Sacramento joined forces with some of the Nation's best known planners and designers to create a strategy for enhancing the contribution of transportation and sensible land use planning to community life and environmental protection. The result was the Ahwahnee Principles, named for the hotel where the group met. A report detailing the Ahwahnee Principles, Land Use Strategies for More Livable Communities, has been released by the LGC.

For more information, contact:

Judy Corbett, 9164481198.

In San Francisco, the Urban Habitat Program of San Francisco and the New Bayview Committee in the Bayview Hunters Point community have developed new Social and Environmental Justice Criteria to evaluate the suitability of transportation plans to the social and environmental needs of the community. The groups performed a needs assessment of the community, addressing issues of population, housing, employment, transportation and the environment, and energy. In addition, the Bayview Hunters Point Project for Social and Economic Justice seeks to use a planned rail transit extension to spearhead revitalization in the AfricanAmerican neighborhoods of Bayview and Hunters Point. STPP's case study of the project is available at 2029393470.

For more information, contact:

Henry Holmes, 4157883666.

In Baltimore, an extremely diverse coalition of community, environmental, business, nonprofit and government organizations joined together to support the Gwynns Falls Greenway, a six mile link connecting diverse communities with each other and with existing cultural, historical and recreational attractions, fueling economic development in neighborhoods outside the downtown core. It is hoped that the Greenway will also play a part in breaking down racial barriers and barriers between neighborhoods of different income levels.

For more information, contact:

Chris Rogers, Trust for Public Land, 2025437552, or,
Lisa Hite, Baltimore Dept. of Recreation and Parks, 4103960928.

In several states, broadbased coalitions have been formed to deal with multiple quality of life issues. In the Lake Michigan area, a multistate coalition has formed to deal with the urban, environmental and transportation problems of the region. In Georgia, the Georgia Transportation Alliance includes groups ranging from public utilities to environmental activists. In Pittsburgh, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Transportation Partnership has forged new alliances among citizens, business leaders and public officials. In Portland, Maine, a publicprivate committee has created the state's most comprehensive and ambitious transportation plan to date. In Missouri, the Missouri Transportation Alliance focuses on the state of Missouri and on the transportation planning processes in Kansas City and St. Louis.

For more information, contact:

Surface Transportation Policy Project, 2029393470.

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The Surface Transportation Policy Project is a nationwide network of more than 800 organizations, including planners, community development organizations, and advocacy groups, devoted to improving the nations transportation system.

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