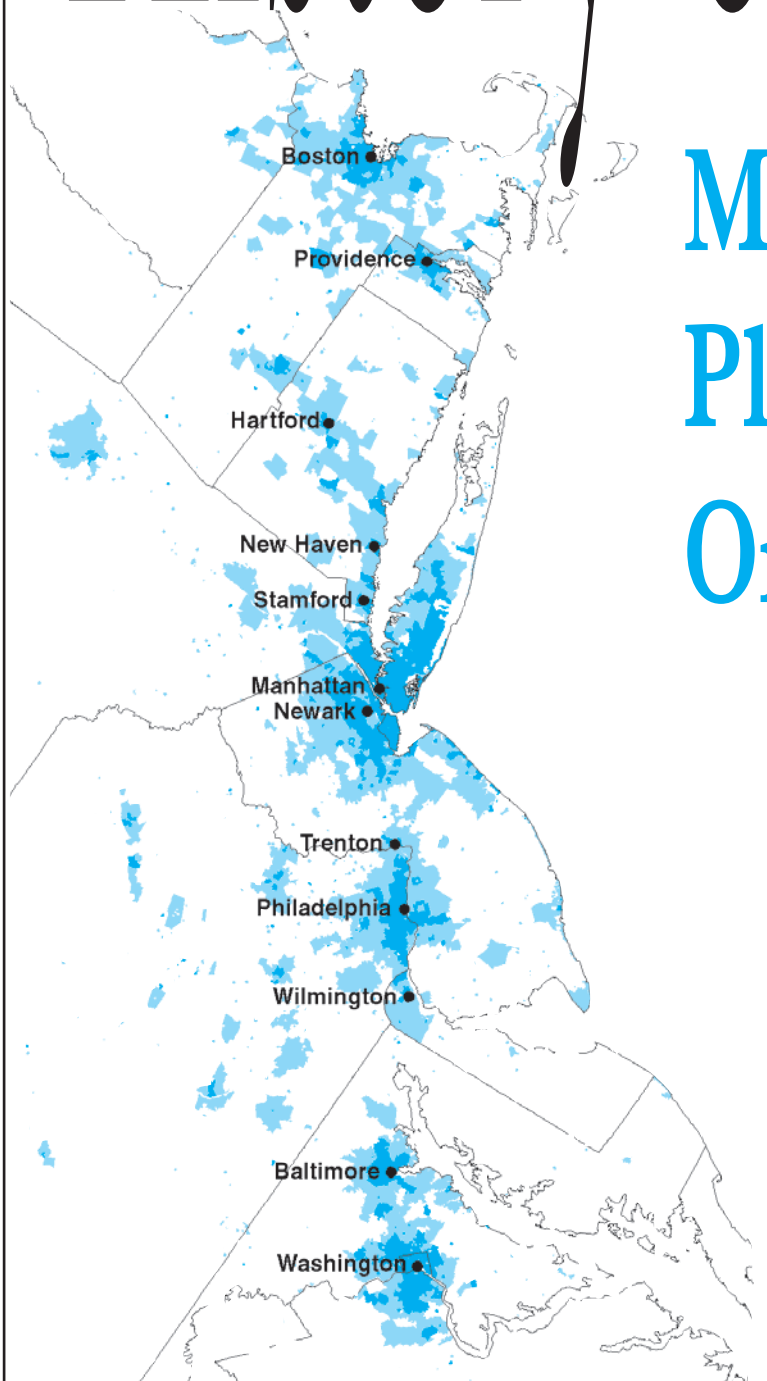
NJTPA
Issue Report

History of



Metropolitan Planning Organizations

The NJTPA

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority Inc. is the federally sanctioned Metropolitan Organization (MPO) for the 13-county northern New Jersey region. As required under the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, the NJTPA approves nearly $1 billion in transportation projects each year and provides a forum for interagency cooperation and public participation. It also sponsors studies, assists member agencies and monitors compliance with air quality goals. Serving 5.8 million people, the NJTPA is fourth largest MPO in the nation. The NJTPA Board consists of one elected official from each of the region's 13 counties and two major cities, Newark and Jersey City. The Board also includes a Governor's Representative, the Commissioner of the NJ Department of Transportation, the Executive Directors of NJ Transit and the Port Authority of NY & NJ and a Citizen's Representative appointed by the Governor. The NJTPA Board meetings are held monthly and are open to the public.

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History of Metropolitan Planning Organizations

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Introduction

The United States may be one nation under God but, politically, it is fractured into a multitude of jurisdictions—states, counties, municipalities, school districts, election wards and more. While necessary for governance, taxation and administration of public services, these jurisdictions, for the most part, bear little relation to the distribution of population and economic activity across the landscape.

Over the last century, the settlement of land in ever-widening rings around the nation's major cities has created regional economies that span local government boundaries and often state lines. In effect, the invisible hand of the market has shaped the man-made landscape with little regard to the formal divisions decreed by government.

The federal government has recognized this organic, market-driven growth process by identifying over 300 "metropolitan areas" across the country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, each consists of "a core area containing a large population nucleus, together with adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that core."

The federal government has also recognized that the integrity and vitality of these areas are dependent on the large-scale circulation of goods and people over regionwide transportation networks. Yet the fragmented political authority in most metropolitan areas makes it difficult to address regional transportation impacts and needs.

For over two decades, the federal government has sought to address this failing by requiring states to establish Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), composed of local elected officials and state agency representatives, to review and approve transportation investments in metropolitan areas. The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority is the MPO for northern New Jersey.

But because they bridge traditional boundaries and lines of authority, from the start, MPOs have been controversial. Critics have argued that they usurp legitimate functions of state governments and constitute an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy. Supporters say they are important mechanisms for insuring local control over federal funding and that they deserve wider authority to implement the plans they create.

Congress, while consistently upholding the need for MPOs, periodically has refined their functions and authority. During the fall of 1997, it was in the midst of doing so again as it considered reauthorizing the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act—the enabling legislation for MPOs .

To provide historical perspective on this Congressional debate, the NJTPA published a series of three articles on the history of MPOs which appeared in the NJTPA ***Quarterly*** during 1996 and 1997. The articles made use of secondary sources to sketch the origins and administrative history of MPOs in the context of the broader developments in the nation, government and the field of regional planning. This publication provides the full text of the history series with added source notes and a bibliography.

Origins of Regional Planning: 1900-1940

FHWA

Congestion was a problem long before the automobile.

Growth of the nation's metropolitan areas was made possible and sustained by improvements in the transportation system. In the 19th century, canals and then railroads helped knit together local and regional markets into a single national economy. Cities with long-established marine ports such as New York and those situated at the hub of major rail routes such as Chicago became the command centers for the emerging national economy. Their industries took in raw materials and fed back finished goods to the rest of the nation. They also served as the headquarters of new business organizations, nationwide in scope, which generated growing numbers of well paying jobs, swelling the ranks of the middle class.

As the cities prospered, they drew in waves of immigrants from around the globe. Soon, new innovations in transportation—horse-drawn railways, electric streetcars and finally, the automobile—provided the circulation systems needed for further growth, spreading population and productive capacities into wide regions around the urban core. Each city came to sit "like a spider in the midst of its transportation web," according to Lewis Mumford.

Imposing order on the rapid and often chaotic growth of metropolitan areas initially became the cause of Progressive Era reformers, academics and specialists in the new field of city planning. While their most visionary plans were never realized, they conducted important studies of regional needs and laid the groundwork for eventual federal programs to support comprehensive regional planning. This chapter traces the origins of regional planning in the first decades of the century.

Progressive Roots

Recognition of the need for planning on a regional scale has its roots in the "Progressive Era," roughly the first two decades of the century. This was a time of great optimism for the growing middle class, when science was seen as offering the path to a more prosperous, efficient and orderly future. Applying scientific principles, industry helped satisfy material wants through mass production of goods and helped ease domestic burdens with a succession of new electric appliances.

Meanwhile, a new intellectual elite of "social" scientists promoted the reorganization of public and private institutions along more rational lines. In consort with business leaders and reform-minded politicians, this elite initiated a variety of crusades to improve the lot of the mass of people, economically and socially. They advocated government run by civil servants, breakup of monopoly companies, "home economics," compulsory education beyond grade school and prohibition of alcohol.

One of the great challenges faced in the Progressive Era was massive urbanization. Cities were growing rapidly as a result of both unprecedented immigration as well as the influx of population from rural areas. Social reformers, taking aim at overcrowded and unhealthful living conditions, pressured city governments to institute sanitation and building codes. Later they fought haphazard development patterns, including the siting of commercial and industrial facilities in residential neighborhoods. In response, cities drew up plans for segregating land uses and instituted the first zoning ordinances to enforce them.

Cities were also expanding outwardly. Many families fled inner-city crowding to homes in suburbs that had access to city jobs via streetcar or commuter rail lines. By the 1920s, as automobile ownership grew, wider areas were opened up to settlement, with many rural villages transformed by a wave of housing development for urban commuters. Most of this growth occurred with little forethought or government intervention. Indeed, existing government structures could only address the trends on a piecemeal basis and, as a result, many problems were left unaddressed including mounting highway congestion, polluted rivers, disappearing open spaces and inadequate water and sewer systems. It was only natural that the Progressive Era emphasis on promoting rational organization would be brought to bear on the growing dispersion of population and economic activity in broad regions around major cities.

Practical Needs

The first efforts at regionwide planning began in the 1920s. While academics provided the theory and social science tools for regional planning (see sidebar p. 8), practical considerations motivated their use. For instance, by the end of World War I, a long-running dispute between New York and New Jersey over rail freight business reached a point where only a solution at a regional scale was possible. The dispute centered on rates charged by rail companies that encouraged goods to be moved from rail terminals in New Jersey to ships berthed in New York. New Jersey claimed the rates limited the development of maritime business on its side of the port. At one

Trolleys and later autos opened up the suburbs to development: Bloomfield Ave. in Glen Ridge, 1921.

Newark Public

Mixing Science & Utopia

At the turn of the century, the systematic collection and analysis of data to help understand and solve urban problems was a new concept. Early practitioners sought to put city planning on the same footing as the "scientific management" then being widely implemented in industry to maximize worker productivity and profits. However, the problems faced in cities were infinitely more complex than those on the shop floor. Standard methods for studying urban problems took many years to develop. Notable advances came in the 1920s, with the advent of new survey research and statistical techniques.

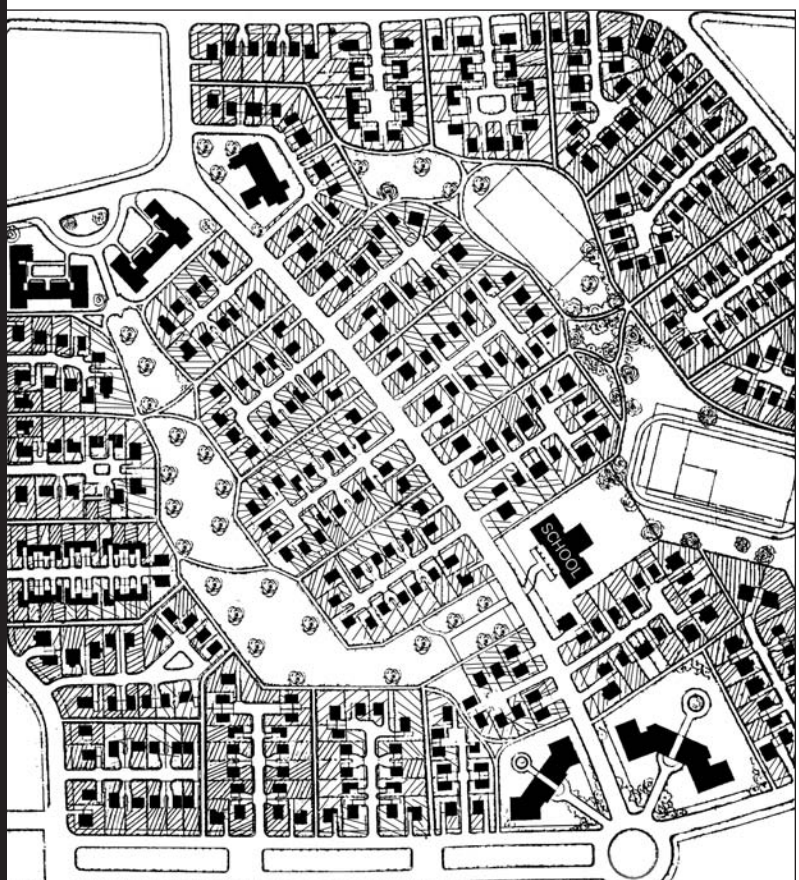
During that decade, a number of the academics offered grand visions for restructuring urban regions. Many drew upon the utopian vision of Ebenezer Howard who in the 1890s urged that excess urban population be shifted to planned "garden" cities, surrounded by "greenbelts" of parks, farms and open land. The cities would contain enough business and industry to achieve a degree of economic self-sufficiency. A number of planned communities, including Radburn in Fairlawn Borough, New Jersey, were inspired by the Garden City vision. In the 1920s and 1930s, Lewis Mumford was among the most prominent advocates for garden cities. Together with strong land use planning, he saw them as a means to achieve a rational distribution of population and economic growth in each region ("balanced urban communities within balanced regions").

point, a lawsuit threatened, Solomon-like, to split the port into two zones, reducing its ability to efficiently serve shippers and leading to the loss of business to other East Coast ports.

New York business leaders recognized the threat and proposed a new bi-state agency to provide unified planning and policies for the port. Backed by the federal Interstate Commerce Commission, the business leaders finally succeeded in 1921 in getting the two states to create the Port of New York Authority (later to become the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey). The authority was the first interstate governmental body in the nation and the first special-purpose "authority" with power to issue bonds and make investments while insulated from political control. In its first year, the Port of New York Authority set about developing a comprehensive plan for improving the entire port with new terminals and connections among rail lines

As this ambitious port plan took shape, other planning efforts were initiated to address a host of emerging regional-level problems. Again, New York area business leaders, together with a growing number of professional city planners, broke important ground. In the early

Vision for Auto-Oriented Suburbs Circa 1928: the community of Radburn in Fair Lawn, NJ was designed with "superblocks" of 30-50 acres with cul-de-sacs, interior parks and extensive walkways.



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1920s, the Russell Sage Foundation appointed a committee to develop a "Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs." The work grew into a massive undertaking, including extensive surveys, data collection and economic projections, focusing upon New York City and 500 communities in three states within commuting distance of Manhattan. The pioneering work would continue for most of the decade during which most other major cities in the U.S. initiated similar "comprehensive" regional plans.

The first volume of the New York plan was issued in 1929 and presented recommendations on nearly every aspect of regional development, including calls for the development of satellite cities in outlying areas, the control of land-use to preserve open spaces and the construction of new rail and highway networks.

Implementation of such a far-reaching plan was problematic. The authors hoped that the logic of their recommendations would do much to promote voluntary compliance by affected governments in the tri-state region. A private planning organization, the Regional Plan Association, was created to promote this compliance and conduct follow-up research.

However, the experience of the Port of New York Authority did not bode well for achieving voluntary compliance. Lacking power to force cooperation among the highly competitive freight rail companies in the region, the Port Authority was blocked in implementing many elements of its plan for creating an integrated freight rail network. Critics argued that the recommendations of the Regional Plan of New York, and of comprehensive plans elsewhere in the country, would be similarly blocked by the competing interests of local governments. One planning professor, Thomas Reed, in 1925 contended that the only way to insure effective regional planning was the creation of "areawide" governments with power over municipalities in setting policies for regional infrastructure.

The Great Depression

Questions about the implementation of comprehensive plans in New York and other cities became all but moot in the face of the economic collapse of the Great Depression. Where toll or other dedicated funding sources were available or where the federal government would foot the bill, selected infrastructure projects recommended by regional plans were built. The New York region fared particularly well, with the George Washington Bridge, Lincoln Tunnel and other major transportation facilities built in the 1930s. But, by-and-large, visions of promoting orderly urban regions with planned communities and efficient infrastructure systems, were abandoned as cities struggled with desperate social and economic conditions.

Still, the regional planning experience of the 1920s exerted an important continuing influence. Through the empirical techniques of the social sciences, planning efforts in major cities had documented the regional nature of many social and economic problems. In doing so, they also created a strong case for new institutions and decision-making mechanisms— such as authorities and regional planning commissions—to supplement fragmented political structures.

The federal government, for its part, carried the torch of regional planning forward as it intervened to revive the economy in the 1930s. President Roosevelt, with great interest in natural conservation, encouraged and supported cooperative planning by governments in river valleys to address flood control, soil erosion and other shared needs. He also initiated a massive federal experiment in regional planning by creating the Tennessee Valley Authority which addressed not only water resources issues but electrification, agricultural improvement, housing and economic development.

Many New Deal programs were administered regionally and encouraged cooperation among local officials. The Public Works Administration, in particular, helped state and local governments develop the planning capabilities needed for large-scale infrastructure projects. But there was a catch. Planning was to be in accordance with national standards as a condition for the receipt of federal infrastructure aid. This requirement set the pattern for future intergovermental relations: the federal government used aid as a lever for promoting achievement of national goals and for persuading state and local governments to look beyond their narrow self-interests in making infrastructure and social investments.

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"Garden State Parkway Booms Jersey Coast"-Newark Star Ledger feature article, 1957.

Regional Responses to the Suburban Land Rush: 1940-1969

At the end of World War II, America was transformed by rapid suburbanization which brought housing, retail and other development sprawling out in every direction around major urban centers. As the transformation proceeded, public and private leaders recognized that existing government structures were inadequate to deal with the problems that arose—not the least of them, inadequate transportation, water and other infrastructure systems, the loss of open spaces and the decline of urban neighborhoods.

This recognition prompted the creation of numerous regional planning bodies. With regulatory and financial backing by the federal government, these bodies by the 1960s took on a variety of official planning functions for their regions. Still, they were seldom able to exert influence over the land use decisions of local governments or the transportation decisions of state agencies which helped drive the continuing suburban land rush.

This chapter traces the post-war developments in regional planning that set the stage for the formal establishment of MPOs in the early 1970s.

Preparing a New Future

During World War II, government and industry leaders were keenly aware of the need to plan for the post-war period. After a decade or more of pent-up demand for housing and consumer goods, the nation was poised for an unprecedented peacetime economic boom. However, the leaders knew that if this demand was not capitalized upon effectively, the nation could easily slip back into the unemployment and stagnation of the pre-war years.

Thus, alongside the patriotic fervor for the war effort, planning for a new post-war America became a national preoccupation. In a number of major cities regional alliances were launched in which public officials joined forces with private industry and surrounding local governments to chart strategies for their post-war future. Their efforts were supported at the federal level by the National Resources Planning Board (NRPB), until it was disbanded by Congress in 1943. The agency urged a "comprehensive" approach to post-war planning that would make use of surveys and community forums and recognize "the interrelatedness of problems of population, economic activities, social patterns [and] physical arrangements."

But by and large the alliances paid little heed to urgings of NRPB for comprehensive planning—or even to the lessons learned in the 1920s about the problems of unfettered regional growth. The dominant view was that, if regions were to seize the coming economic opportunities, bold initiatives would be required. Rather than engage in the cautious planning advocated by the NRPB, most regional alliances focused upon preparing housing, business development and infrastructure projects that could be quickly implemented with the war's end.

Planning new freeways became a favored activity. Many of the regional transportation systems envisioned were straight out of the

The GM Futurama exhibit at the 1939 World's Fair inspired postwar highway systems.

By the end of 1946, 10 million men and women were discharged from the armed services and new family formation rose to a record 1.4 million per year.

General Motors' "Futurama" exhibit at the 1939 World's Fair—cities linked and served by networks of congestion-free, limited-access highways that presumably would make the nation's crowded and run-down mass transit systems a thing of the past. In 1944, Congress gave its endorsement to this "motor age" vision with initial authorization for construction of a nationwide interstate highway system. If the nation was to move boldly into the future, apparently it would do so solely by automobile.

Highways laid the path for the suburban housing boom: Land cleared for the Route 4 (later, Garden State) Parkway in Cranford, circa 1948. Inset: Parkway construction in Woodbridge, 1949

New Jersey State Archives, Dept. of State

Suburban Land Rush

By the end of 1946, 10 million men and women were discharged from the armed services and new family formation rose to a record 1.4 million per year. The need for new housing to accommodate them reached near-crisis proportions. The national housing agency estimated that five million new housing units were needed immediately and 12.5 million would be needed over the next decade.

Private developers jumped at the opportunity. Using pre-fabricated materials, "cookie-cutter" plans and standardized construction techniques to create "tract" housing developments, the developers sought to attract veterans—with their generous GI mortgage benefits—and middle class urban dwellers eager to enjoy the privacy and amenities of new, detached suburban homes.

The most aggressive and successful of the private developers was Levitt and Sons, who transformed potato farms on Long Island into the 17,000-home Levittown, creating the model for similar communities in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. By 1950, according to one estimate, Levitt was producing one four-room house every 16 minutes.

In all, three-fifths of all new housing in the late 1940's was built in the suburbs. On the heels of the suburban housing boom, retailers, manufacturers and other businesses sought out suburban locations, resulting in an increasing dispersion of economic activity that had long been compacted in and around major cities.

The dispersion, in addition to meeting the material and employment needs of the new suburbanites, was viewed by military officials as having strategic benefits, making the nation's population and productive capacities less vulnerable to nuclear attacks against major cities. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright put it bluntly: "The urbanite must either be willing to get out of the city or be resigned to blowing up with it." This cold-war calculus provided further impetus to national-level support for a continuing suburban land rush.

Federal Planning Aid

Inevitably, many rural communities faced growing pains in accommodating waves of new residents. In some areas, the pains became outright sickness. Symptoms included poorly laid-out housing developments and inadequate schools, roads and water and sewer systems. Many homeowners also faced their share of woes from slapdash building methods, including leaky roofs and faulty sewer hook-ups. Planner and historian Lewis Mumford, surveying the growing chaos in many areas, termed it "the suburban fallout from the metropolitan explosion."

The nation's cities, too, were shaken. The loss of middle class residents and business further exacerbated the social and economic problems that had received scant attention through the long years of economic depression and then war.

Congress responded with

major housing legislation, first in 1949 and again in 1954. The acts primarily supported continued suburban development, with financing and insurance programs benefiting both homebuyers and builders. But the acts also authorized federal aid to cities for urban renewal and public housing and supported new regional planning efforts. Section 701 of the 1954 Act for the first time gave federal grants for councils of governments and other metropolitan planning agencies to promote cooperation in analyzing and addressing regional problems.

Testifying before Congress, urban planning professor Robert Mitchell argued that such planning aid was needed to build "awareness that central cities and suburbs are interdependent and cannot survive in the present governmental and physical chaos."

The federal aid proved popular, prompting the formation of nearly 100 metropolitan planning bodies. Yet, while the new agencies improved intergovernmental cooperation, they generally were hamstrung by their inability to directly shape local government land use policies. Indeed, many local officials supported regional planning only to the extent that it would sustain their capacity to ac-commodate the windfall of development projects coming their way.

Some communities chose to go it alone, hiring consultants to develop master plans that would rein in the more disorderly aspects of growth. The extreme case was the community of Mountain Lakes, New Jersey, which purchased all the town's vacant, developable land to be parceled out only for those projects that fit the sensibilities of its wealthy residents.

Interstate Highways

The ambivalence on the part of local officials towards regional planning changed dramatically with the 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act. The legislation authorized construction of the multi-billion dollar, 41,000 mile interstate highway system as well as providing aid for primary, secondary and lesser roads. The system constituted the largest construction program in the nation's history —- on the scale of 60 Panama Canals. With the choice of routes left up to state highway departments, many local officials found new cause to embrace cooperation through metropolitan planning agencies to avoid having routes imposed on them and to gain bargaining clout in negotiations with their states.

Still, the resulting cooperation had few of the features of the comprehensive regional planning advocated years earlier by the NRPB when the interstate system was conceived. Rather much of the "planning" was of a narrow, technical nature focusing on routing alignments. Despite the urging of the planning community, the Act did not require routes to conform to metropolitan plans already in place or to give consideration to crucial land use issues, such as how particular routes could open up wide areas to new waves of suburban development and sprawl. Also the Act all but neglected the further damage that could be done to urban transit systems, which already were pitched into a steep decline due to competition with the automobile.

The decision to forge ahead with the massive interstate highway system with only dim recognition of its potential consequences partly stemmed from the influence on Congress of those with something to gain from the system—the defense establishment, developers, auto manufactures, oil companies, state and local engineers and others.

But it also reflected a peculiarly-1950s outlook about the future. It was a decade of national self-assurance when American industrial and military might dominated much of the world. Any challenges which might appear on the horizon, the view went, would yield to technology and American ingenuity.

Faith in the future was also strong among transportation officials in the 1950s. Even the demise of mass transit systems was seen as amenable to technical fixes. For instance, a 1956 Brookings Institution report stated that "In the coming decade the development of regional mass transportation by helicopter or convertiplane may provide the longer distance commuting services now provided by interurban buses and commuter rail lines."

All this added up to a confidence in building large-scale projects in the name of progress, leaving the consequences to be sorted out later. It was an outlook personified in "master builder" Robert Moses who, from the 1930s on,

On a flight over northern New Jersey, he said, the traveler "has a fleeting illusion of green space, but most of it has already been bought up and outlying supermarkets and drive-in theaters are omens of what is to come."

oversaw the construction of major highways, bridges and parkways in and around New York City—as he lashed out at "ivory tower planners" for being preoccupied with potential complications.

Three-C Planning

By the late 1950s, the effects of a decade or more of rapid suburban growth began to dampen the widespread "build it now" enthusiasm. Many planners and public officials were alarmed at the nation's changing landscape. In 1958, planner William Whyte noted that a traveler flying from Los Angeles to San Bernardino "can see a legion of bulldozers gnawing into the last remaining tract of green between the two cities." On a flight over northern New Jersey, he said, the traveler "has a fleeting illusion of green space, but most of it has already been bought up and outlying supermarkets and drive-in theaters are omens of what is to come."

These concerns led to studies during the Eisenhower Administration of new government structures and policies that could help improve local planning and coordination. Many study recommendations were enacted under the Kennedy Administration as part of the Housing Act of 1961 which provided grants for mass transit and open space preservation and expanded funding and incentives for metropolitan transportation planning.

A further, and historic, step in addressing the problems of rapid suburbanization came with the enactment of the Highway Act of 1962. It made federal highway aid to areas with populations over 50,000 contingent on the "establishment of a continuing and comprehensive transportation planning process carried out cooperatively by state and local communities." This required planning process—known as "three-C" planning for its continuing, comprehensive and cooperative features—established the basis for metropolitan transportation planning used to the present day.

While regional cooperation and comprehensiveness had been long-sought goals of the planning community, the Act's requirement for continuous planning recognized that in a rapidly changing and increasingly complicated environment—which included dramatic population growth resulting from the post-war baby boom—regional plans had to be dynamic documents, subject to revision based on continuing data collection and feedback. Advancements in computer technology and social science research techniques became important tools for conducting this continuous planning.

Three-C in Practice

In the year following the adoption of the 1962 Act, governments throughout the country scrambled to put in place the required three-C process. The response of officials in the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan region was typical of major urban regions. Since the late 1950's, the non-profit Regional Plan Association, with input from many of the area's officials, had been developing a comprehensive plan for meeting the region's infrastructure needs. As a result of the 1962 Act, a new official body, the Tri-State Regional Planning Committee (later the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission), was created to build upon this planning effort and

Newark Public

New homes under construction in Toms River, 1966.

administer the region's three-C transportation planning process. A number of similar metropolitan planning bodies were created across the country and some existing voluntary and quasi-official re-gional bodies gained official status.

Despite the high initial expectations created among many planners by the new organizations and the enlightened nature of the three-C requirements, the weaknesses of the Act became clear in subsequent years. Implementation of the Act was the responsibility of the federal Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) which was closely allied with state highway departments and organizations dedicated to roadway construction. According to urban planning professor Thomas A. Morehouse, the three-C planning requirement was seen by these highway interests as "a potentially disruptive innovative force, threatening established policies, procedures, commitments and systems of decision-making." Of particular concern to highway interests was the possibility that local officials acting through new regional organizations—with mandates for comprehensive planning in hand—could block or slow construction of segments of the interstate system which were then were being pushed through densely populated metropolitan areas.

To avert the threat, BPR interpreted the Act in ways that preserved the authority of state highway departments. For instance, states were able to fulfill the "cooperative planning" requirement by negotiating agreements directly with local governments, bypassing regional planning organizations. These agreements typically allowed local officials to participate in technical studies, initiated and dominated by state highway departments, for planning the implementation of specific roadway projects or for establishing long-range regionwide capital plans. Land use, mass transit and social issues were usually given only passing consideration.

One result of BPR's "artful" interpretation of the required three-C process was that regional planning agencies were left largely as adjuncts to state highway departments which relied upon them for collecting and interpreting data and perhaps for input on how road construction within their regions should proceed. In effect, the 1950s "build it now" approach to project development lived on in the 1960s, though it was now tempered by somewhat greater local participation and informed by increasingly sophisticated technical studies.

1960s Progress

While many of the hopes of the early 1960s were never fully realized, the cause of improved regional planning was by no means vanquished. With crucial support by President Johnson and his political allies, major transportation and housing legislation during the decade progressively expanded the role and authority of regional planning agencies (see box, right). In his message to Congress shortly after his election, Johnson noted that in confronting housing, transportation or other urban problems, metropolitan planning was needed to "teach us to think on a scale as large as the problem itself and act

to prepare for the future as well as repair the past."

In addition to new responsibilities in the areas of environmental and transit planning, regional bodies were entrusted with reviewing all applications for federal aid to insure they were consistent with areawide plans and were coordinated with other federal-aid projects.

Though carefully crafted to preserve the prerogatives of business and avoid the taint of "big government," these legislative requirements were a significant step towards comprehensive regional planning. Their enactment reflected an often grudging recognition among politicians that the nation could simply not afford to build major projects that would transform its landscape and communities without attention to the consequences that, more often than not, played out on a regional scale. This recognition sprang, on the one hand, from increasing sophistication in social and environmental sciences that brought to light the damage done by unthinking policies of the past and that offered important new tools and methodologies for planning the future. On the other hand, mass movements and urban riots showed that narrow, technical approaches to problems could neglect critical social factors, with potentially devastating results.

The greatest impact of the legislative mandates was felt in the nation's largest metropolitan areas where regional agencies like the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission in New York and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission in Philadelphia took on multiple official functions in cooperation with states and local governments. However, across the country, the bulk of staff resources, engineering expertise and political influence needed to see plans through to implementation continued to reside in state bureaucracies. Particularly in many smaller urban areas, regional agencies found themselves going through the motions in fulfilling federal requirements while key decisions on transportation and other policies were made in state capitals.

1960s Regional Planning Acts

In 1959 President Eisenhower created the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) to explore new government structures and policies to address suburban growth problems and improve coordination of the increasing number of federally-aided projects and programs. A succession of major legislation in the 1960's helped realize many of the ACIR recommendations for replacing the largely ad hoc regional commissions in place with permanent and stronger metropolitan bodies:

■The 1964 Urban Mass Transportation Act, was the first major legislation to provide federal aid for development of mass transit systems. In doing so, it provided incentives for preparation of metropolitan transportation plans. A 1966 amendment created transit technical studies grants.

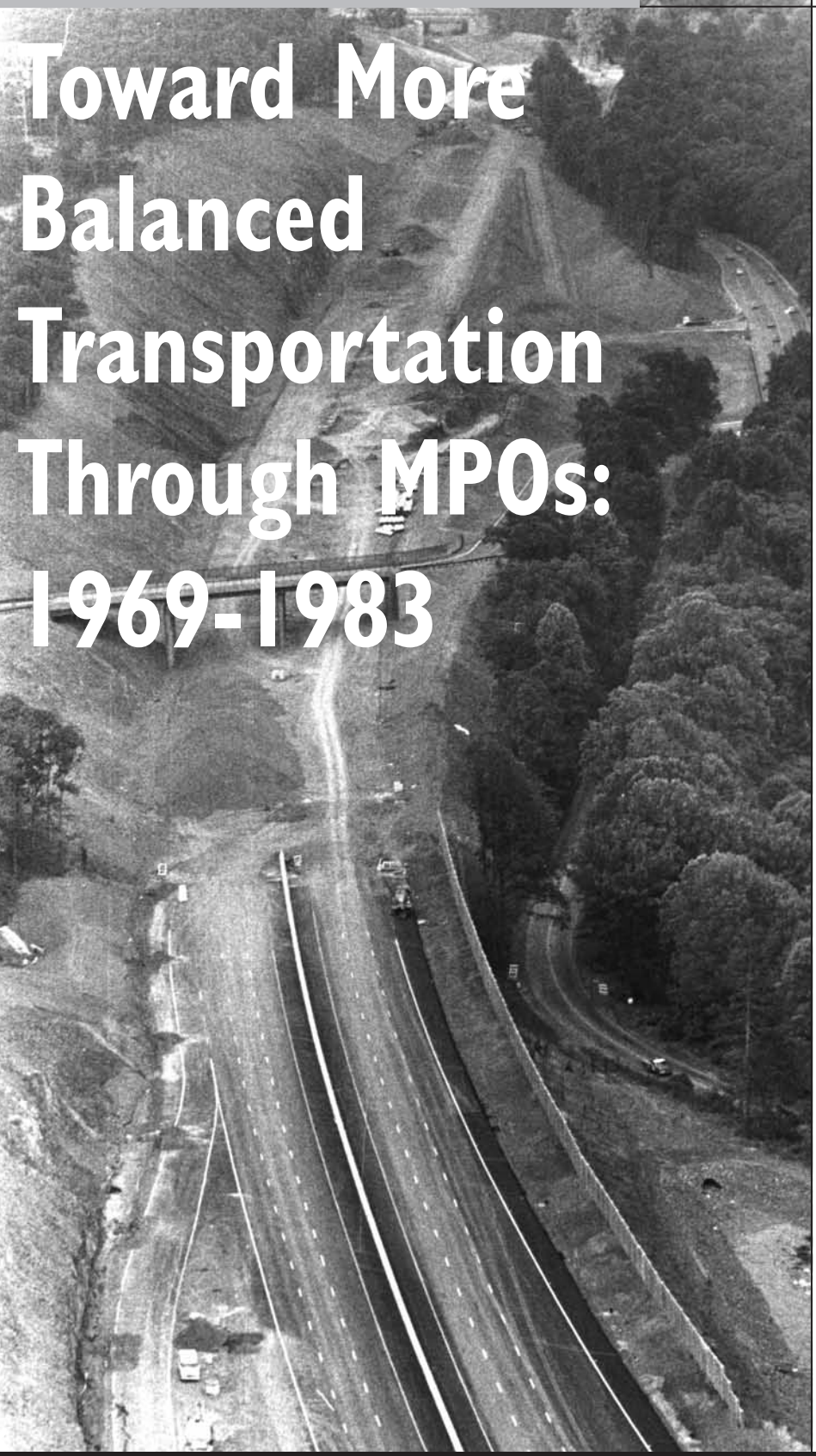
■The 1965 Housing and Urban Development Act extended and broadened the "Section701" grants created in the 1950s to support mass transit planning by regional planning bodies, helping to improve the coordination of highway projects with transit systems.

■The 1966 Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act, and 1968 follow-up legislation, required all applications for federal aid for the planning and construction of housing, roads and other facilities to be submitted to an areawide planning agency for review and comment. The goal was to insure that the applications were consistent with regional plans and were coordinated with other federal aid projects. Many regional planning agencies and Councils of Government were entrusted with these "A-95" clearinghouse functions for federal-aid.

■The 1966 Federal-Aid Highway Act provided protections for historic buildings and natural resources in highway planning and required hearings to be conducted on the economic, social and environmental effects of proposed routes. Amendments in 1969 required citizen participation in all aspects of the three-C transportation planning process administered by regional bodies.

■The 1969 National Environmental Policy Act required Environmental Impact Statements to be prepared for major projects, inaugurating an environmental dimension to transportation planning that would take on growing importance in decades to come.

Toward More Balanced Transportation Through MPOs: 1969-1983



Construction on one of the last major interstate highways, I-78, in 1985.

For much of the 1950s and 1960s, America built highways on a grand scale. With billions of dollars from federal gasoline taxes, each year 2,000 miles or more of elaborately-engineered interstate highways were dynamited through mountains, lifted over rivers, snaked across the countryside and bulldozed through densely-populated urban areas. The highway building effort commanded wide public support and was backed by a powerful coalition of politicians, business leaders and interest groups.

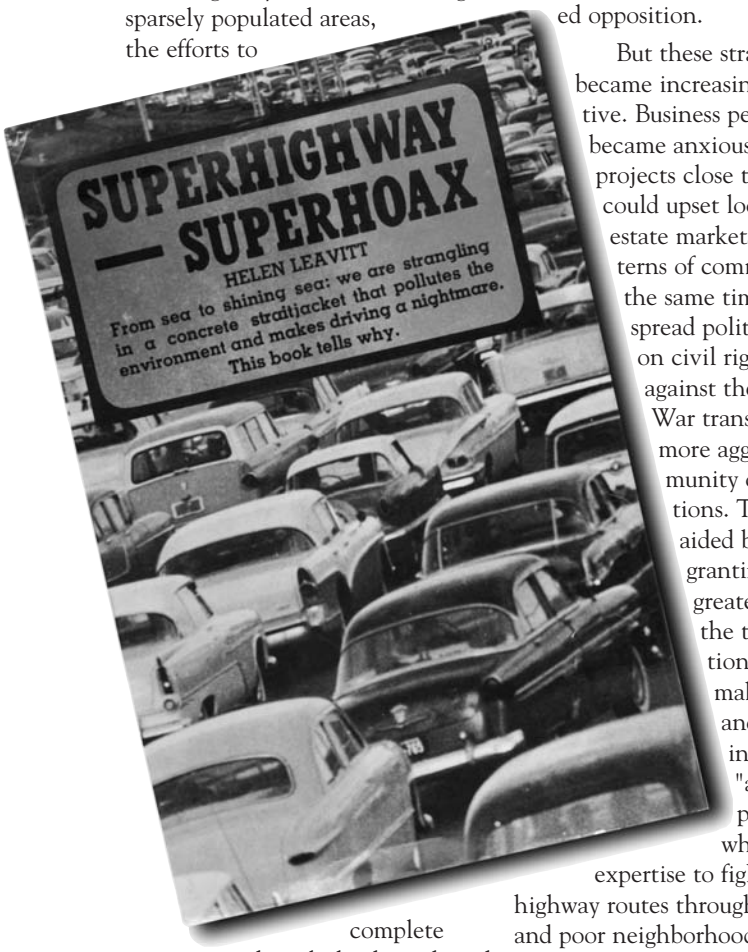
Yet by the early 1970s the highway juggernaut was in serious trouble. Facing often fierce opposition in urban neighborhoods, concerns about the environment, funding shortfalls and other complications, highway projects were slowed, scaled-back and even blocked in many locations. Congressional hearing rooms became the scene of heated debate over efforts to broaden federal policy to embrace other transportation goals—such as supporting mass transit systems and ridesharing programs—that would reduce the nation's dependence on automobiles for mobility.

To help the nation cope with the vastly more complex transportation policy environment in the 1970s, Congress required each urbanized area to establish a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) composed largely of local officials. Congress hoped MPOs would help build regional agreement on transportation investments that would better balance highway, mass transit and other needs and lead to more cost-effective solutions to transportation problems.

As this chapter recounts, MPOs generally failed to live up to expectations during their first decade. Eventually, they faced cutbacks in funding and support for their missions, though formal federal requirements for transportation planning through MPOs continued.

Highway Resistance

Throughout much the 1960s, opposition to nation's massive interstate highway building program grew to formidable proportions in many cities. In contrast to the initial stages of the program when highways were built through sparsely populated areas, the efforts to complete roadway links through and around major urban centers often prompted firestorms of controversy. According to Alan Altshuler, former Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation, in building major urban roadways, "There was no way that highway planners could avoid stepping on an extraordinary number of toes."



Highway planners traditionally dealt with controversies over proposed routes by privately cultivating support among key political and business leaders. Publicly, they used detailed traffic studies to outflank the technically unsophisticated opposition.

But these strategies became increasingly ineffective. Business persons became anxious about huge projects close to home that could upset local real estate markets and patterns of commerce. At the same time, the widespread political activism on civil rights and against the Vietnam War translated into more aggressive community organizations. They were aided by laws granting the public greater input into the transportation decision-making process and by a growing number of "advocacy planners" who lent their expertise to fights against highway routes through minority and poor neighborhoods.

Even traffic studies advanced to support projects no longer retained the assumption of legitimacy. Recognition was dawning that cities could not easily build their way out of congestion. In many cases, as University of Virginia professor Peter Norton noted, "urban freeways could only relocate [congestion], easing traffic flow in some areas while hindering it in others." Overtime, some new highways even compounded congestion as they spawned new traffic-generating residential and commercial development.

In 1970, Helen Leavitt, author of *Superhighway - Superhoax,* offered the maxim: "Congestion rises to meet road capacity." And many highway officials, grudgingly, were coming to acknowledge its truth.

As the tide was turning against urban highways, there were a number of high profile casualties. In 1969, Robert Moses' planned "Lower Manhattan Expressway," an elevated highway which would have vaulted across the island through the then run-down commercial district of Soho, was turned down by city officials. Its defeat came after years of determined opposition, led by urbanologist Jane Jacobs. In the same year, in New Orleans, a "Riverfront Expressway," was killed after a bitter ten-year fight because it would impinge on a historic area.

Environmental Hurdles

Congress responded to the growing chorus of discontent by enacting laws that placed new hurdles in the way of highway projects. In addition to laws requiring generous compensation for residents and businesses directly affected by new roadways, Congress passed the sweeping National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in 1969. It required detailed environmental studies of major projects and plans for minimizing not only on air, water and noise pollution but disruptions to historic sites, scenic vis-

tas and neighborhoods.

Additional landmark environmental legislation was passed in the wake of the first Earth Day, April 22, 1970. For over a decade, the environmental movement had been building in strength and influence. With Earth Day, the movement reached a critical mass of popular support and burst onto the national stage. Twenty million people across the country participated in peaceful demonstrations and teach-ins. Earth Day organizer U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson called it a "truly astonishing grassroots explosion."

Politicians from across the political spectrum quickly became outspoken champions of the environment. Congress, for its part, passed the Clean Air Act of 1970 which set emissions standards for new cars and banned lead in gasoline ("Get the Lead Out" read bumper stickers during the Congressional debate). The law also required states to develop plans for controlling rising levels of automobile use -- enforced by a new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). A Federal Water Pollution Control Act followed two years later.

Search for Solutions

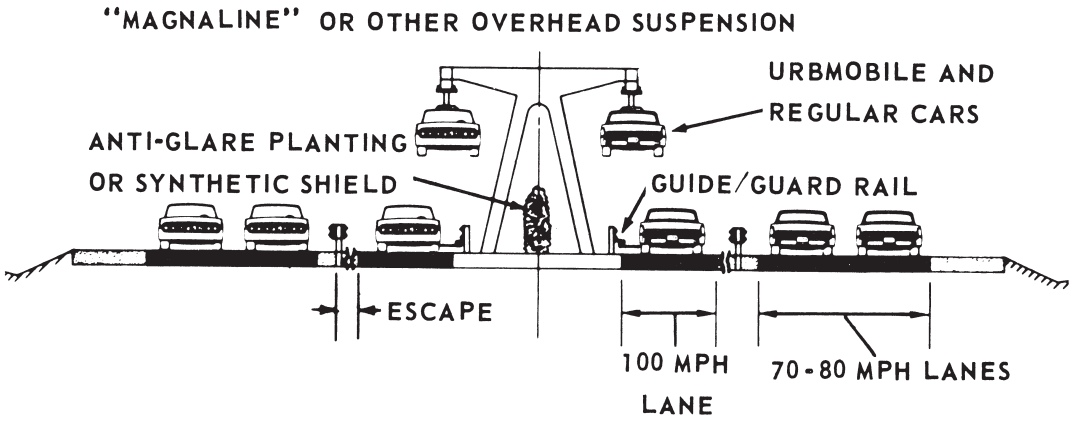
The upshot of the wave of environmental legislation as well as the backlash against urban highway projects was a serious rethinking of the long-held gospel that national progress was tied to the automobile. Steadily rising inflation also entered the picture in the early 1970's. The result was tighter transportation budgets at all levels of government and the imposition of federal wage and price controls.

Federal highway and mass transit legislation began to encourage more cost-effective approaches to transportation problems. Rather than massive new highway projects to combat congestion, federal officials urged smaller, more strategic roadway improvements. These included completing missing links between roadways, redesigning intersections to improve traffic flow and widening selected highway segments to remove bottlenecks.

Facilitating mass transit and other modes of travel was also important. Additional federal funds were made available for upgrading long-neglected bus and rail systems, creating park-and-ride lots, reserving bus-only lanes on highways and promoting car-pooling.

Such "multimodal" and "transportation management" projects could squeeze greater capacity from the existing transportation network without encouraging auto use, incurring huge costs or inflicting major environmental damage.

Despite the new federal focus, state decisions about how to allocate federal funds remained biased towards highway projects. While many state *highway* departments had been renamed *transportation* departments to reflect a more multimodal philosophy, in fact



One futuristic vision, circa 1968, for squeezing more capacity from highways involved hoisting cars onto fastmoving elevated conveyers. From Robert Wolf. *Metrotran-2000*. Cornell University, 1968.

most of the staff working in them were still highway engineers and planners. The new environmental and fiscal constraints had forced them to scale-back many of their plans and search for innovative solutions to congestion. But completing favored highway projects -- in particular, the remaining 10,000 miles of the planned 41,000-mile interstate highway system -- was still at the top of their agenda.

Balance Shift

A year-long battle in Congress in 1972 over a highway funding bill dealt a further setback to the cause of continued highway expansion. Urban interests and environmentalists lobbied Congress to allow a portion of gas taxes deposited into the federal Highway Trust Fund to be used for a wide range of mass transit projects. Big city mayors, many of whom were forced to take over money-loosing private bus and rail companies, were particularly eager for expanded federal transit aid.

But the highway lobby would have none of it. According to Indiana University professor George Smerk, "Highway interests... guarded the Highway Trust Fund against diversion to other than highway purposes with the same fierceness as a mother bear guards her cubs."

During the Congressional debate, the previously localized opposition to highway building received a wide national hearing. New York Times columnist Tom Wicker argued against urban highway projects “that gobble up land, ruin neighborhoods with air and noise pollution, scatter our cities into patternless chaos and force more and more people into more and more automobiles for which there will never be enough parking until the country is paved over."

The urban-environmental interests were able to block passage of the highway bill until 1973 when Congress authorized the use of highway monies for mass transit, phased-in over a number of years. While roadway projects to address rising levels of congestion, especially in suburban areas, would still command the lion's share of funding, the bill was a major political defeat for the highway lobby. It signaled the waning of lobby's once mighty influence.

MPOs Funded

The mandate for more balanced and multimodal transportation systems, focused new attention on regional organizations such as Councils of Government and Regional Planning Commissions, composed of local officials and representatives of major interests in each metropolitan area.

In the early 1960's, the federal government had required regional agencies to conduct "continuing, comprehensive and coordinated" (3-C) transportation planning. Yet ten years later most were serving only an advisory role. They were effective at providing technical assistance to local agencies and promoting coordination among them. But their actual planning work, focusing years into the future, often was viewed by elected officials "merely as an exercise in meeting federal requirements, not the means of providing meaningful solutions to their problems." This left the crucial day-to-day decisions about allocating funding and choosing projects largely to highway-oriented state officials.

States, and even many local officials, were comfortable with this arrangement, in part because it allowed deals to be cut over projects. Federal officials, however, pushed to strengthen regional planning. They wanted regional agencies to become forums for developing consensus on the most cost-effective approaches for solving transportation problems. This included balancing road, mass transit or other needs and addressing environmental, economic and community concerns.

Congress took important steps in this direction in crafting the 1973 Highway Act. At the urging of federal officials and the urban-environmental coalition, they dedicated a small portion of each state's funding from the Highway Trust Fund for new "Metropolitan Planning Organizations" (MPOs) to be established or designated in each urbanized area over 50,000 in population. In doing so, Congress gave federal officials the legal mandate and financing they sought to transform the hodgepodge of regional bodies across the country into effective, multimodal planning agencies. Many saw the new MPOs as a means to counter, or at least keep in check, the domineering influence of state transportation departments in pushing highway projects.

Oil Shock

As federal regulators began working out standards and procedures for the new MPOs, international events intervened to drasti-

Many Park & Ride lots were established in the 1970's.

'Holistic' Regional Planning

In 1973, Oregon Governor Tom McCall warned the state legislature of the serious threat posed by "sagebrush subdivision, coastal condomania and the ravenous rampage of suburbia." The speech bolstered efforts to create more effective planning to preserve Oregon's prized environment and livable cities.

The efforts in the Portland metropolitan area have since become a widely-cited model for the nation. Metro, the only popularly-elected regional government in the nation, was created in 1979 and provides planning and direction for Portland and 23 surrounding towns in three counties. Metro, which is the designated MPO for the region, uses controls over growth to minimize sprawl, encourage transit, walking and biking and increase the cost-effectiveness of public infrastructure investments.

All housing and other development over the next 20 years must occur within the region's Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). This development must support the region's close-knit neighborhoods and mixed-use "main street" districts. Outside of the UGB, Metro has designated Urban Reserve areas for potential future development and Rural Reserves in which farms and forests are protected. Metro has adopted a goal of reducing the miles of vehicle travel by 20 percent over the next 30 years.

Another national model of comprehensive regional planning is the Metropolitan Council covering the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul and 189 towns in seven counties. Established in 1967, the Council, like its Portland counterpart, serves as the region's MPO and has established an urban growth boundary for limiting sprawl and protecting rural and natural areas. It also has established the nation's only unified metropolitan tax base in which the tax revenues from richer communities are shared to help defray the costs of schools, transportation and other infrastructure in poorer districts.

Both Portland and the Twin Cities are struggling with pressures for additional growth. Portland is considering expanding development into its "urban reserves." The Twin Cities, without the support of strong statewide growth management, is facing competition from sprawl development that has "leap frogged" to areas outside its seven-county jurisdiction.

cally alter the context for transportation planning.

Middle East oil producers, angered over U.S. support for Israel in its war with Arab states, imposed an oil embargo in October 1973. The five-month embargo shattered American's long-assumed birthright to cheap and plentiful fuel. Looking back from the 1990s, journalist James Howard Kunstler recounted the embargo's immediate impact: "Erratic deliveries of gasoline caused localized supply shortages. Lines formed at pumps everywhere, people panicked, fistfights broke out, work schedules were disrupted, vacations were canceled and nobody knew if the country would be able to carry on as before."

Energy conservation became an urgent concern. Congress imposed a nationwide 55-mile per hour speed limit, set fuel economy standards for new cars and took measures to spur domestic oil production.

The 1973-1974 embargo, with the quadrupling of world oil prices, led to soaring inflation and a long, punishing recession. Congress and federal agencies moved with even greater determination to promote a more efficient and less auto-dependent transportation system. For the first time, federal funds were provided to subsidize the daily operations of transit systems. MPOs were looked to as the agents of change in urban areas to break business-as-usual attitudes about transportation priorities.

New Jersey Newsphotos

Raising the Earth Day flag at Columbia High School in Maplewood, NJ, April 22, 1970.

MPO Planning

After a series of interim steps, the final rules governing MPOs were issued in 1975. Joint development of the rules by the highway and transit administrations of the federal Department of Transportation itself constituted a significant achievement in multimodal planning. MPOs, then being organized, had to include the "principal elected officials" of local governments in their regions. They took a variety of forms: extensions of existing regional bodies, newly created freestanding agencies or, in the smallest urban areas, committees staffed by state or county employees.

The most significant responsibility handed to MPOs involved compiling and approving a short-range component to the long-range plans previously developed in most urban regions. This three to five year agenda of projects was called a Transportation Improvement Program or TIP. For the first time, both highway and transit projects had to be included in a single planning document and state and local

New Jersey Newsphotos

agencies were required to gain approval of regional agencies—MPOs—to obtain federal transportation funds. In compiling the TIP, MPOs were required to give special consideration to projects that reduced or better managed, rather than just facilitated, traffic -- for instance, through new traffic signal systems, park-and-ride lots, intersection improvements and pedestrian facilities.

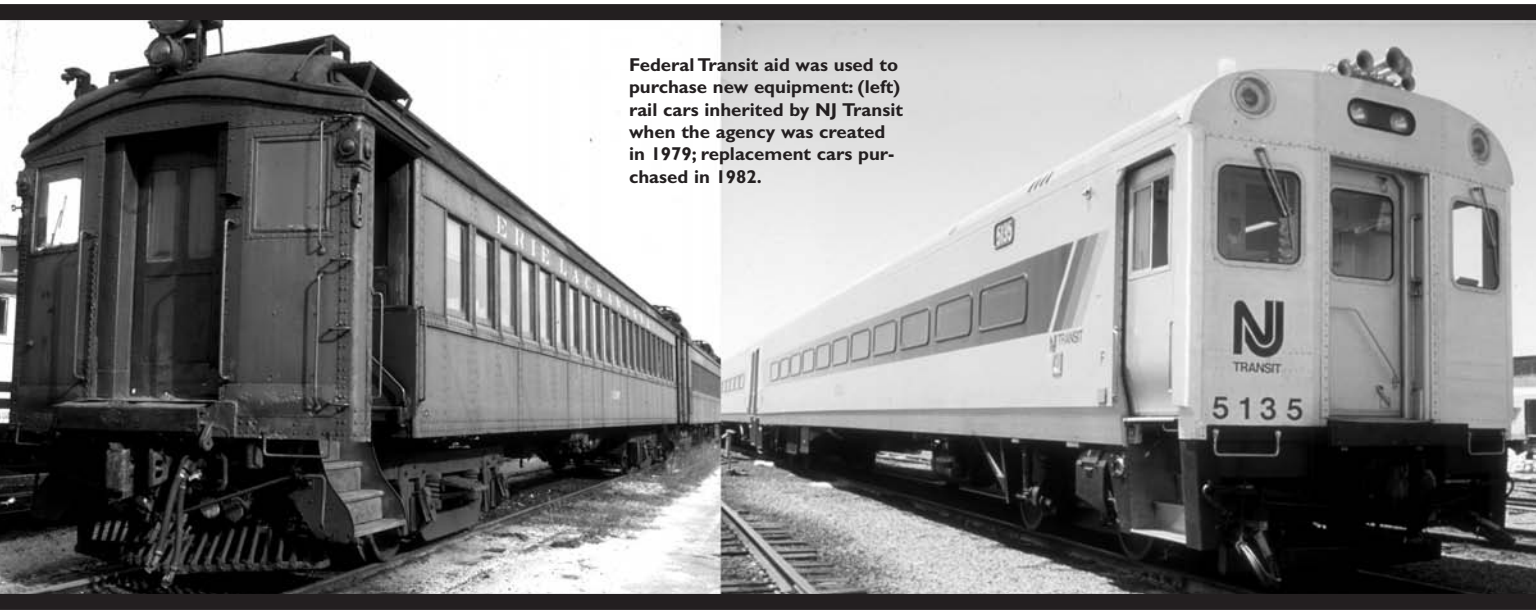
Associations of state and county officials reacted angrily to the authority accorded to MPOs. They viewed the new bodies as "a federally-imposed level of regional government that impinges on the lawful authority of local and state governments." Yet federal officials forged ahead with their rules, giving MPOs a chance to prove their worth.

From the start, MPOs faced difficulties in advancing the cause of multimodalism. This was due not only to wary or even hostile officials but to increasingly severe budget limitations. Many states had large backlogs of roadway projects and many of the roads built in the past two decades were coming due for repair or replacement. These needs prompted the creation of new federal-aid programs and pushed many innovative, multimodal projects to the back burner. Indeed, except in New York City, only a tiny portion of highway funds ever found their way to mass transit projects, despite the hard-fought battle in Congress in 1972 to allow such transfers.

The public was also less than enthusiastic about multimodal projects, especially when the projects restricted their freedom to drive where and when they wanted. California's efforts in 1976 to reserve a highway lane for buses and car pools was met with outrage and soon abandoned. As the energy crisis receded from the public's memory, programs to encourage car pooling rarely attracted more than one percent of urban commuters.

Still, there were some encouraging developments. A number of faltering mass transit systems were rescued thanks to expanded federal aid and attention. Supplementing these traditional bus and rail systems were a variety of innovative transit services. These included "demand-responsive" shuttle buses, company-sponsored van pools and nearly two dozen automated "people movers" – sometimes described as "horizontal elevators" -- constructed at airports, shopping centers and amusement parks.

Meanwhile, several urban areas, including Portland and Minneapolis-St. Paul, were demonstrating how metropolitan-wide governing bodies could overcome fragmentation among local jurisdictions. They were taking "holistic" approaches to solving transporta-



Federal Transit aid was used to purchase new equipment: (left) rail cars inherited by NJ Transit when the agency was created in 1979; replacement cars purchased in 1982.

NJ Transit

Lining up for gas on Route 22 in Springfield, NJ, June 1979.

tion, housing, land use and other inter-related problems (see sidebar, p.22).

Crisis of Confidence

At the end of 1970's, despite localized successes in finding innovative approaches to transportation problems, consensus was growing that transportation planning had become too complex and cumbersome to effectively address many pressing needs in urban regions. Over the previous two decades, a succession of laws and regulations had added layer upon layer of planning requirements. They were intended to address concerns about the environment, the integrity of neighborhoods, the health of local economies, needs of the elderly and disabled, energy conservation, transit finances and other issues.

Yet in many cases multiple reviews and paperwork required by federal laws prevented the timely implementation of even relatively simple projects. In other cases, the need to balance or trade-off competing concerns led to acrimony and gridlock in investing available federal aid.

In 1980, disputes over land use and other non-transportation policies, led to the break-up of one of the nation's largest regional agencies, the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission, covering the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan area (the New Jersey arm of which became the predecessor agency of the NJTPA).

But dissatisfaction was not limited to transportation planning and MPOs. The national economy in the late seventies was in a sad state, suffering from the bewildering new malady "stagflation" -- a combination of stagnating economic activity and high inflation, accompanied by high unemployment. The immediate causes included higher energy prices, the decline of manufacturing in favor of service jobs and the shift of population and economic activity from the "rust belt" up North to the "sun belt" in the South and West. But much of the public's ire was focused not on these structural factors but on federal policies. The New Deal strategies of using fiscal and monetary policies as well as expanding federal programs to safeguard the national standard of living appeared to be failing miserably.

The second oil embargo in Spring, 1979 (see sidebar, right) deepened the economic woes, pushing inflation to over 13 percent and disrupting the lives and livelihoods of many families. Americans were left with deep uncertainties about the future. The New York Times commented that "the American spirit of optimism seems to be suffering a brownout, a loss of power and drive." President Carter chided the American people to overcome their "crisis of confidence" and growing "malaise."

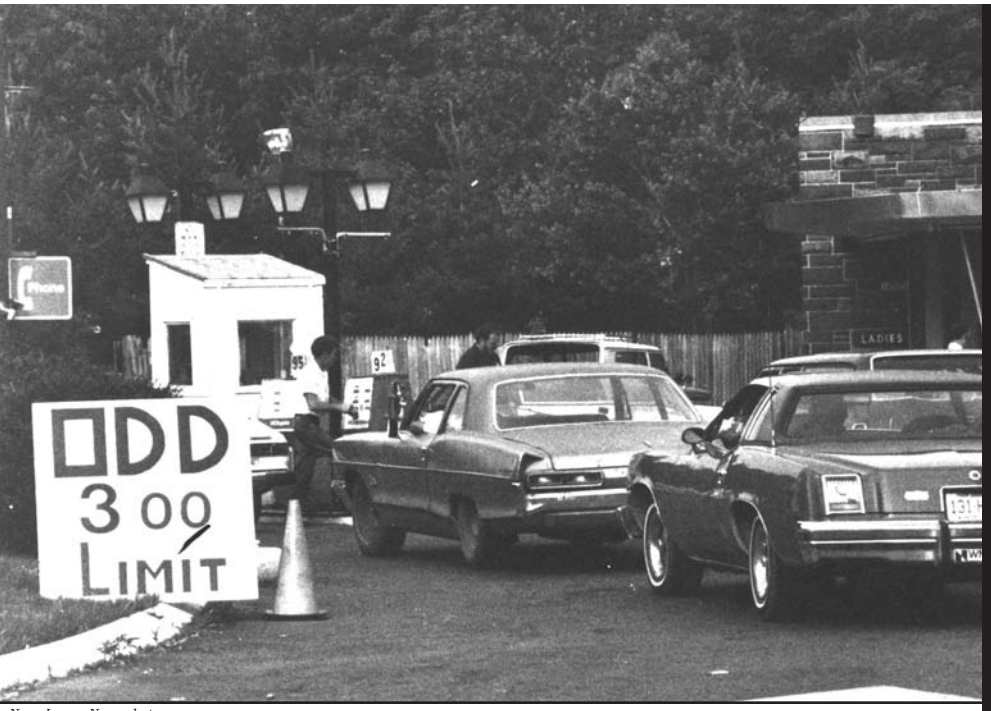
But majority of the American electorate had had enough. In 1980, they elected Ronald Reagan who promised a radical break with New Deal policies that had dominated the national government for over four decades.

New Deal Undone

Reagan took office declaring his "intention to curb the size and influence of the federal establishment" which he saw at the root of "our present troubles." After a year of deep cuts in the federal bureaucracy, he took on what he called the "jungle of grants-in-aid." As a result of the growth of federal aid programs, he said, "a maze of interlocking jurisdictions and levels of government confronts average citizens in trying to solve even the simplest problems." His solution was a turn-back of federal responsibilities to state and local governments.

The changes pulled the rug out from under many regional agencies. According to the count of researcher Bruce McDowell, "38 of 39 federal programs that underwrote or required regional planning were terminated, deregulated or suffered major budget cuts between 1979 and 1984." This included requirements for regional "A-95" reviews of federal grants and for the development of housing and wastewater treatment plans.

The one major regional planning requirement left on the books concerned MPOs. While they were still required to plan and approve transportation projects, new regulations left it up to each state to define their specific roles. Many MPOs were reduced to rubber-stamping the decisions of state agencies in compiling their annual TIP capital plans. As a result, according to McDowell, MPO capital planning came to "basically confirm what is going on in the fragmented region, rather than providing any areawide leadership."



New Jersey Newsphotos

After losing much of their formal authority and funding, many regional agencies became more entrepreneurial, marketing their planning services to local governments and other agencies. However, the national priorities they once actively promoted -- notably, energy conservation and congestion relief -- did not completely fall by the wayside. The Reagan Administration ordered government agencies (including MPOs) to facilitate private sector initiatives to address these and other priorities.

Private sector companies indeed were taking a more active role -- for instance, banding together in Transportation Management Associations to promote ridesharing and other congestion relief programs in major employment centers. But many in Congress saw the need for continuing federal leadership and funding to address transportation needs. Over Reagan's veto, they expanded federal transportation aid through a five cent increase in the gasoline tax, one cent of which was set aside for mass transit. Despite this show of independence, on most other issues, Congress dutifully handed Reagan the legislation he needed to sustain his revolution of lower taxes, deregulation of industry and smaller government.

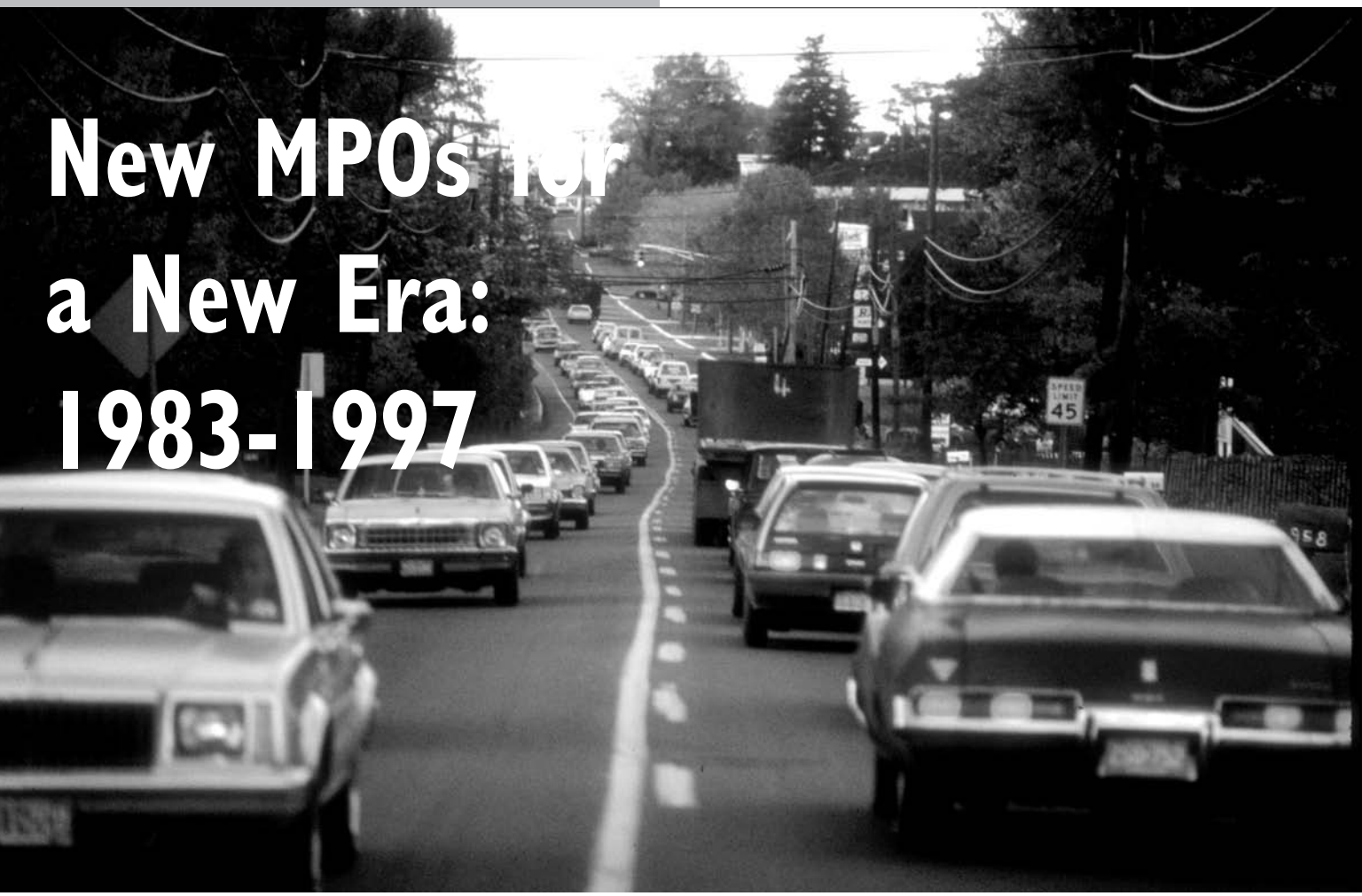
Energy Crisis II

During his first year in office, President Carter vowed to make energy conservation the "moral equivalent of war." When Middle-East nations imposed a second oil embargo in the Spring of 1979, precipitated by U.S. support for the deposed Shah of Iran, the nation had a 70-day supply of oil on hand, as opposed to a 56-day supply during the first embargo in 1973-74. Still, for average Americans the crisis was no less severe or shocking. Once again, they faced long gas lines and rationing that limited purchases to odd or even dates based on their license plate numbers.

Throughout the nation, gas prices climbed over $1, prompting accusations of oil company profiteering and Congressional inquiries. In Maryland, the Deputy Attorney General declared the gasoline shortage the "greatest crisis" for his state since the Civil War. In Connecticut, 14 new staffers had to be hired by the AAA to assist drivers running out of fuel on the state's highways. In the West, truckers staged slow moving convoys over highways to protest fuel allocations. On Long Island, a youth was arrested for stealing 1.2 gallons from a police station gas pump. In the Bronx, two motorists were shot during a near-riot at the pumps in which drivers "wielded knives, crowbars, two-by-fours and jack handles."

Today, these events have largely faded into history. Rising world oil production and more fuel efficient cars have made oil supplies plentiful—at least until well into the next century. Adjusted for inflation, gasoline is even cheaper than it was in the 1950s. However, global warming and other environmental concerns—as well as unforeseen international events—could once again make energy conservation a top national priority.

New MPOs for a New Era: 1983-1997



Peter Taft Middlesex Somerset Mercer Regional Council

Many suburban roads became major commuting routes in the 1980's: Middlesex County, NJ.

The enactment of the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) ushered in something of a renaissance for MPOs. After a decade or more of being consigned to a minimal role in transportation planning, ISTEA gave MPOs increased funding, expanded authority to select projects and mandates for new planning initiatives in their regions. State transportation officials, for the first time, were required to seriously consult with local representatives on MPO governing boards.

The changes had their roots in new political alignments and the need to address increasingly difficult transportation problems – in particular, the more complicated patterns of traffic congestion that arose with the suburban development boom in the 1980s. Many recognized that the problems could only be effectively addressed through a stronger federal commitment to regional planning.

This chapter traces the events that ushered in the ISTEA era and highlights the progress made under the legislation. It provides a backdrop for the debate underway in Congress on ISTEA reauthorization scheduled for 1998.

Boom Times

The Reagan revolution of the early 1980s was followed by the Reagan recovery of the mid-1980s. The economic rebound brought a new wave of housing, commercial and office development to the nation's suburban and rural areas. While much of the development was spurred by improving real estate markets, many projects were made possible by new banking rules which opened the door for riskier -- and, in some cases, even fraudulent -- business ventures.

In New Jersey, headlines during 1985 told the story of the economic turnaround: "Development Coming like a Tidal Wave to Somerset County." "Route 206 Leaving Its Rural Past Behind." "Its Boom Time in What Once Was the Boonies." "Real Estate Boom Reflected in Rising Values Along Route 1 Corridor."

The spread of development to areas previously considered economic backwaters later prompted some observers to discern a new form of economic organization taking shape in the nation. New "Edge Cities" were arising in the midst of the suburban and "exurban" landscapes (see sidebar, p.30).

While the location of growth may have shifted, the problems accompanying development were all too familiar. As many suburban roads were pressed into service as major commuting routes, traffic congestion mounted and spread over wider areas. In 1986 Robert Cervero wrote that 20 miles from the downtowns of Houston, Los Angeles and Washington DC, "rush hour traffic has gone from free-flow to gridlock conditions in a span of five years along some stretches." The situation caused growing public frustration -- with ominous political overtones. One mayor in northern California observed, "No one's out there trying to hang politicians yet but the public is a sleeping giant on this issue and they're incensed."

Elected officials responded with new efforts to manage growth and deal with its impacts. Many localities tightened-up zoning and assessed "impact fees" on developers to pay for transportation improvements. A few passed ordinances requiring companies to reduce the volume of auto trips to their facilities.

State-level remedies were also explored. In New Jersey, the state legislature in 1986 established an Office of State Planning to develop a comprehensive growth management plan that would channel development back into urban areas and into denser, more transit-friendly suburban "centers."

New Federal Focus

With the transition from the Reagan to the Bush Administration, there was growing interest in a stronger federal role to help solve the nation's vexing transportation problems. In addition more complex patterns of congestion resulting from the suburban development boom, longer-term trends, including smaller households and more women working outside the home, added to travel demand on the nation's roadways. Overall, between 1983 and 1990, the annual miles of vehicle travel grew 30 percent, a rate faster than population growth. Traffic management strategies, widely used to cope with the demand, were increasingly found to have only localized benefits and they tended to diminish over time.

If the need for federal assistance was growing, so too were the opportunities for creating a new federal role. By the late 1980's, after 20 years of long and often torturous fights over interstate highway routes, nearly all the remaining routes that had a realistic chance of being built were either funded or under construction. This made it possible to redirect federal gasoline tax revenues to other transportation needs.

Creating a new, more active federal role became a top priority of the new U.S. Secretary of Transportation, Samuel Skinner, the former head of the Chicago transit system. He told an aviation group, "I am totally -- with a big "T" -- committed to developing a national transportation policy." Despite criticisms from former Reagan officials who decried this "centralized" approach, Skinner began to sound-out the transportation community on possible new programs and funding arrangements for his national policy.

Environmental issues, meanwhile, became the focus of Congressional attention. The Reagan Administration had devoted itself to giving industry relief from "onerous" environmental regulations, including drastically cutting the EPA's budget and enforcement powers. In the late 1980s, however, headlines about acid rain and other problems motivated increased public concerns about the environment and the need for action. President Bush and Republicans in Congress sought to regain the environmental mantle for their party by breaking the decade-long deadlock over amendments to the Clean Air Act. After a particularly difficult legislative wrangle, the amendments

Suburban Futures

Over the last two decades, many suburban areas have moved out of the economic shadow of central cities to become powerhouses of jobs and commerce in their own right. According to Joel Garreau, the trend has led to the formation of new "Edge Cities" (the title of his 1991 book) which will become the "crucible of America's urban future." He says edge cities are areas with more than five million square feet of office space and 600,000 square feet retail space which become major commuting and shopping destinations. The hundred or more edge cities across the U.S. "contain all the functions a city ever has, albeit in a spread-out form" including trade, employment and entertainment. In the New Jersey, he identifies 11 edge cities. While edge cities today appear chaotic, he says, they are still in their infant stages. He predicts that edge cities will mature to become the dominant form of organization – and driving force -- for the nation's information economy.

Critics of Garreau acknowledge the new forms of economic organization in the suburbs and farther-out "exurbs." Yet they question whether it can be, or should be, sustained. The growth of edge cities is based on auto-oriented suburban sprawl which consumes open space, degrades the environment and drives up infrastructure bills. Even at their best, they charge, edge cities exclude the poor and rob older cities and towns of economic vitality. James Howard Kunstler, author of "The Geography of Nowhere," sees a devastating spiritual and aesthetic loss in continuing suburbanization. The roadside landscape he said has been littered with bad, modernist architecture and garish commercial messages – "ubiquitous highway crud." Travelers have "little sense of having arrived anywhere, because everyplace looks like no place in particular." The alternative, promoted by Kunstler and many planners, is New Urbanism, the effort to recreate or revive small town America, in which residents live in denser, pedestrian-scale communities with main streets and central public squares.

New Jersey Edge City: Parsippany-Troy Hills.

were approved in 1990, strengthening requirements on the nation's cities.

The achievement of bi-partisan compromise on a complicated issue like air quality and the reassertion of a strong federal role in enforcement were important precedents for the coming Congressional efforts to formulate a new transportation policy for the nation.

ISTEA

As the work on the new transportation policy got under way in Congress, it became clear that state officials and their allies in the highway lobby, despite being the richest and best organized of interest groups, would not call the shots as in past legislative efforts. Environmentalists, strengthened by their victory over the Clean Air Act Amendments, wielded considerable influence with key committees. Allied with mass transit advocates, progressive planners and others in the Surface Transportation Policy Project, they urged Congress to emphasize the needs of people rather than automobiles and to make the environment an integral part of transportation decision-making.

The legislation that emerged, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), was signed into law by President Bush in December 1991. It focused on improving transportation not as end in itself but as the means to achieve important national goals including economic progress, cleaner air, energy conservation and social equity. ISTEA promoted a transportation system in which all modes and facilities were integrated to allow a "seamless" movement of both goods and people. New funding programs provided greater flexibility in the use of funds, supported improved "intermodal" connections and emphasized upgrades to existing facilities over building new capacity – particularly roadway capacity.

On the slate that Reagan had wiped nearly clean of regional planning requirements, Congress through ISTEA drew up provisions to require "large metropolitan areas to begin serious, formal transportation planning." A Senate Committee report confessed, "Had this been specified in the legislation providing for the Interstate System, we possibly would have a more efficient transportation network today. But that was then, now is now."

To accomplish more serious metropolitan planning, ISTEA doubled funding for MPO operations and required the agencies to evaluate a variety of multimodal solutions to roadway congestion and other

transportation problems. MPOs were also required to broaden public participation in the planning process and see that investment decisions contributed to meeting the air quality standards of the Clean Air Act Amendments.

On the crucial issue of project selection, ISTEA sought to put MPOs on a more equal footing with state transportation departments. Large MPOs assumed lead authority for selecting projects to be undertaken with certain categories of federal funds. State-MPO cooperation was required on the use of the remaining funding. In deciding among projects -- and in their long-range planning activities-- MPOs were required to consider a wide range of economic, environmental and social goals. They also had to "fiscally constrain" their long-range plans and short-range TIPs. This meant that the plan and TIP could no longer contain "wish lists" of projects, from which state officials could pick and choose as funding became available; rather MPOs had to create realistic, multi-year agendas of projects matched with available funds.

New Relationships

ISTEA upset long-standing power relationships in many states. For the first time, many state Departments of Transportation had to seriously cooperate with MPOs on project selection and other matters. To do so, they had to reorient their staffs and negotiate new procedures with MPOs necessary to fulfill ISTEA requirements. During the early years, many states resisted sharing their power.

Many MPOs, themselves, were ill-prepared for the changes brought about by ISTEA. After decade or more of minimal funding and responsibilities, MPOs were thrust into the position of being key players in transportation planning for their regions. Many had to hire new staff and quickly gear up to meet the ambitious new requirements. They also faced the task of establishing an effective public presence, including reaching out to freight operators, businesses and other transportation system users.

In recent years, there have been considerable signs of progress in meeting the goals of ISTEA. The project selection and fiscal constraint requirements have led to a planning process that is "more rational than political," according a 1996 Government Accounting Office survey of MPO officials. One reason is that many MPOs have established standardized procedures to compare and evaluate proposed projects. In northern New Jersey candidate projects are awarded points according to measures of how well they fulfill six broad goals for regional transportation developed with extensive public input.

At federal hearings conducted around the country in 1996 testimony was presented that "many states and MPOs, after some awkward first steps, had formed useful and productive relationships." The hearings also found that "ISTEA's emphasis on multimodal transportation has been a catalyst for changing the overall mix of transportation options." This has included not only more transit projects but non-traditional projects to improve goods movement and pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

By any measure, the work of fulfilling the goals of ISTEA remains unfinished. Some states and MPOs lag behind in establishing genuine cooperation. Some federal requirements are overly prescriptive. And there are large gaps in the knowledge needed to address many difficult mobility issues. Yet there is consensus throughout much of the transportation community that ISTEA is heading in the right direction.

ISTEA is scheduled for reauthorization in 1998. Some have proposed a radical "devolution" of federal responsibilities and funding to states, much like the "turn-back" approaches tried during the Reagan era. But Congress appears likely to take a more moderate course, building upon the comprehensive federal framework it established with ISTEA to help states and regions cooperatively create a more balanced and efficient national transportation system. ■

Conclusion

For most of the century, America has struggled with the problems that accompanied the formation and growth of metropolitan areas as the nation's principle units of economic and social organization. The spread of population and productive capacities over wide areas around central cities brought with it infrastructure, environmental and other problems on a regional scale not easily addressed by existing government structures whose jurisdictional lines reflect historical settlement patterns rather than economic realities.

In the 1930s, the federal government began experimenting with using the leverage of federal aid, channeled through regional organizations, to require at least minimal metropolitan-wide planning and cooperation. By 1990, however, most of these efforts had been curtailed due not only to changing political winds in Washington but the perception that some federal planning requirements were proving more bureaucratic than effective.

The one exception has been regional planning requirements involving economically-crucial transportation issues. ISTEA is the latest attempt to improve upon the federally-sanctioned metropolitan transportation planning process. By requiring MPOs to help implement the Clean Air Act Amendments, ISTEA has added a significant environmental component to the process.

Even if the goals of ISTEA are substantially achieved in coming years, the search for solutions to metropolitan issues will have to continue. Transportation and air quality, after all, are two parts of a broader complex of interrelated metropolitan issues. These issues include environmental conservation, growth management, urban revitalization, economic development, water resources management, improvement of educational institutions, welfare reform, health care access and public safety.

In most regions these issues are dealt with on a piecemeal basis by local governments, statewide agencies or special purpose districts. However, in many urban areas, Councils of Government and other regional bodies—many of them the "parent" agencies of MPOs—are attempting to implement more comprehensive and coordinated approaches. Their authority and structure varies widely, from bodies that advise and assist local governments to metropolitan governing boards with powers over taxation and land use. Despite growing success, they receive very little attention or assistance at the federal level; rather, most rely on state and local funding, supplemented by private sector support and by program-specific federal grants, especially for transportation, housing, services for the elderly and job training.

In coming years, the experience with ISTEA may provide opportunities for strengthening regional planning. ISTEA's approach of empowering MPOs, while providing for flexibility in the use of funding, improved state-regional cooperation and enhanced public participation is proving increasingly effective. It could one day serve as the model for broader federal leadership in helping address the critical issues facing metropolitan areas across the nation.

Source Notes

1. Origins of Regional Planning: 1900-1940

- Each city came to sit "like a spider in the midst of its transportation web," according to Lewis Mumford. Quoted in Owen, p. 10.

Progressive Roots

- Applying scientific principles, industry helped satisfy material wants: Boardman, P. 90.
- elite of "social" scientists promoted the reorganization of public and private institutions: Lubove, p.14. Boardman, p. 99.
- cities drew up plans for segregating land uses and instituted the first zoning: Scott, p. 193.
- Suburban growth in 1920s left many problems unaddressed including mounting highway congestion: Scott. p.209.

Practical Needs

- a long-running dispute between New York and New Jersey over rail freight business: Doig, p.36.
- the Port of New York Authority set about developing a comprehensive plan: Lesser, P.31.
- major cities in the U.S. initiated similar "comprehensive" regional plans: Scott, p. 213.
- the Port Authority was blocked in implementing many elements of its plan: Lesser, P. 33.
- Thomas Reed, in 1925 contended that the only way to insure effective regional planning was …: Scott, p. 225.

The Great Depression

- Where toll or other dedicated funding sources were available… selected infrastructure projects … were built: Lesser, p. 36-37.
- The federal government, for its part, carried the torch of regional planning forward … in the 1930s: Scott pp. 300-305
- Tennessee Valley Authority: Hall, p.161.

Sidebar: Mixing Science and Utopia

- Early practitioners sought to put city planning on the same footing as the "scientific management": Scott, p. 117. Lubove, p. 14.
- "garden" cities, surrounded by "greenbelts": Hall, p.93.
- "balanced urban communities within balanced regions": Mumford, p. 401.

2. Regional Responses to the Suburban Land Rush: 1940-1969

Preparing a New Future

- planning for a new post-war America became a national preoccupation: Scott, pp. 397, 404
- NRPB… urged a "comprehensive" approach to post-war planning that would make use of surveys and community forums and recognize "the interrelatedness of problems….": Krueckeberg, p. 164.
- the alliances paid little heed to urgings of NRPB for comprehensive planning: Scott, pp.413, 435.
- General Motors' "Futurama" exhibit and highway plans : Scott, pp.361, 440.

Suburban Land Rush

- The national housing agency estimated that five million new housing units were needed immediately…: Wright, p. 242.
- the developers sought to attract veterans…and middle class urban dwellers: Wright, p.248. [many developers also implemented racially discriminatory covenants which were not outlawed until 1968: Wright, p. 248]
- Levitt was producing one four-room house every 16 minutes: Wright, p. 252.
- three-fifths of all new housing in the late 1940's was built in the suburbs. Scott, p. 452.
- Frank Lloyd Wright put it bluntly: "The urbanite must either be willing to get out of the city…": Owen, p. 22.

Federal Planning Aid

- Lewis Mumford, surveying the growing chaos in many areas, termed it "the suburban fallout …": Scott, p. 504
- urban planning professor Robert Mitchell argued that such planning aid was needed to build "awareness that central cities and suburbs are interdependent…: Scott, p. 499.
- new agencies… were hamstrung by their inability to directly shape local government land use policies: Scott, p. 513.
- Mountain Lakes, New Jersey, which purchased all the town's vacant, developable land: Scott, p. 508.

Interstate Highways

- on the scale of 60 Panama Canals: Scott, p. 537
- many local officials found new cause to embrace cooperation through metropolitan planning agencies: Scott, p.536.
- Interstate the Act did not require routes to conform to metropolitan plans: Scott, p. 539.
- "the development of regional mass transportation by helicopter or convertiplane may provide the longer distance commuting services…": Owen, p. 159.
- Robert Moses …lashed out at "ivory tower planners": Scott, p. 403.

Three-C Planning

- "a legion of bulldozers gnawing into the last remaining tract of green between the two cities": Editors of Fortune, p. 115.
- "three-C" planning: Weiner, p. 41.

Three-C in Practice

- following the adoption of the 1962 Act… metropolitan planning bodies were created across the country: Scott, pp. 585-86
- the three-C planning requirement was seen by these highway interests as "a potentially disruptive innovative force…": Morehouse, p. 167.

1960s Progress

- Johnson noted that … metropolitan planning was needed to "teach us to think on a scale as large as the problem itself…": Scott, p.611.
- urban riots -- showed that narrow, technical approaches to problems could neglect critical social factors: Scott, p.619.
- the bulk of staff resources, engineering expertise and political influence needed to see plans through to implementation continued to reside in state bureaucracies. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, pp.72-73.
- key decisions on transportation and other policies were made in state capitols: Morehouse, p.164. Harrigan, p. 332. Scott, 606.

Sidebar: 1960s Regional Planning Acts

-1960s Regional Planning Acts: Weiner, pp. 39-84.

3. Toward More Balanced Transportation Through MPOs: 1969-1983

Highway Resistance

- "no way that highway planners could avoid stepping on an extraordinary number of toes.": Altshuler, p.40.
- better organized and more aggressive community organizations: Altschuler, p. 41.
- "advocacy planners" lent their expertise:Harrigan, p.327.
- "urban freeways could only relocate congestion…": Norton., P.5.
- Overtime, some new highways even compounded congestion: Lewis & Sprague, P. 11.
- "Congestion rises to meet road capacity.": Leavitt, p.38.
- Lower Manhattan Expressway…was disapproved by the city officials in 1969. Leavitt, p.64.
- a "Riverfront Expressway,"in New Orleans was killed: Leavitt, p. 90 and U.S. Senate, 1972, p..489.

Environmental Hurdles

- NEPA requirements: Weiner, p. 83
- Earth Day was a"truly astonishing grassroots explosion.": Envirolink web site.

Search for Solutions

- legislation began to encourage more cost-effective and "multimodal" approaches: see Weiner, pp. 87, 89 &119; and Altschuler, pp.7 & 342.
- completing favored highway projects was still at the top of their agenda: Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. p. 77; and Lewis and Sprague, p. 11.

Balance Shift

- "Highway interests... guarded the Highway Trust Fund against diversion…":Smerk, p. 75.
- Tom Wicker argued against urban highway projects: Wicker.
- the bill was a major political defeat for the highway lobby: Altschuler, p. 38.

MPOs Funded

- ten years later most regional agencies were serving only an advisory role: Harrigan, P. 332-3
- MPO planning "merely as an exercise in meeting federal requirements…": U.S. Department of Transportation. 1977, p.51.
- federal officials pushed to strengthen regional planning: U.S. Department of Transportation, 1972, p. 322.
- Many saw the new MPOs as a means to counter the…influence of state transportation departments: U.S. Senate Public Works Committee Hearing.1972. Testimonies by: Barbara Reid, Environmental Policy Center. P. 867 and Donald Spaid, Amer. Inst. of Planners, P.566.

Oil Shock

- "Erratic deliveries of gasoline caused localized supply shortages…": Kunstler, p.109.

MPO Planning

- final rules governing MPOs were issued in 1975: Weiner, p.126.
- Associations of state and county officials reacted angrily to the authority accorded to MPOs: U.S. Department of Transportation. 1977, p.9.
- only a tiny portion of highway funds ever found their way to mass transit projects: USDOT, 1977, p.73.
- California's efforts to reserve a highway lane for buses and car pools was met with outrage: Jackson, P.251
- programs to encourage car pooling rarely attracted more than one percent: Altshuler p.150.

Crisis of Confidence

- transportation planning had become too complex and cumbersome to effectively address many pressing needs: Weiner, p.171-2; and USDOT (Transportation Taskforce…), p. 18.
- "the American spirit of optimism seems to be suffering a brownout..": Roberts. p.1

New Deal Undone

- "a maze interlocking jurisdictions … confronts average citizens…": Reagan, p.1.

38 of 39 federal programs …were terminated… Quoted in Gage, p.208

- MPO capital planning came to "basically confirm what is going on in the fragmented region…": McDowell, p. 132; Lewis & Sprague, p.17.
- Companies were…banding together in Transportation Management Associations: Weiner, p. 190.

Sidebar: 'Holistic' Regional Planning

- "sagebrush subdivision, coastal condomania …": quoted in Bianco, p. 9.
- Metro… uses controls over growth to minimize sprawl: Portland Metro web site
- Another national model… is the Metropolitan Council covering the Twin Cities: Twin Cities Metropolitan Council web site
- The Twin Cities… facing competition from sprawl development that has "leap frogged": McDonnell

Sidebar: Energy Crisis II

- Carter vowed to make energy conservation the "moral equivalent of war.": Quoted in Altschuler. p.124.
- Throughout the nation, gas prices climbed over $1: various New York Times articles, 1979
- adjusted for inflation, gasoline is even cheaper than it was in the 1950s: Salpukas.

4 New MPOs for a New Era: 1983-1997

Boom Times

- In New Jersey, headlines during 1985 told the story of the development boom: Sternlieb & Schwartz, bibliography
- "rush hour traffic has gone from free-flow to gridlock conditions…": Cervero xxi
- "No one's out there trying to hang politicians yet…": Cervero 12

New Federal Focus

- the annual miles of vehicle travel grew 30 percent: Lewis & Sprague. p.6.
- Traffic management strategies… tended to diminish over time. Lewis & Sprague. p.40f.
- "I am totally…committed to developing a national transportation policy.": Cushman.
- Republicans sought to break the deadlock over amendments to the Clean Air Act: Bryner, Chapter 3.

ISTEA

- Surface Transportation Policy Project…urged Congress to emphasize the needs of people: Lewis & Sprague, P. 11-12
- ISTEA's new funding programs provided greater flexibility: Weiner. p.240-51
- A Senate Committee report confessed…: U.S Senate. 1991, P. 1.
- TIP could no longer contain "wish lists"…Lewis and Sprague, p.27,29.

New Relationships

- planning process that is "more rational than political," GAO, p.5
- Testimony was presented at Federal hearings… USDOT,1997. p 16
- there is consensus … that ISTEA is heading in the right direction: USDOT,1997

Sidebar: Suburban Futures

- Critics of Garreau …question whether it can be, or should be, sustained: see for instance McGovern, p.18.

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Surface Transportation Policy Project - http://www.transact.org/

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Twin Cities Metropolitan Council - http://www.metrocouncil.org/

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