Regionalism Through Partnerships? Metropolitan Planning Since ISTEA

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Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) were given significant new responsibilities for transportation decision-making with the passage of ISTEA but were expected to carry out these responsibilities in partnership with state agencies and a variety of public and private interest groups. Since the ISTEA partnership approach is continued under the follow-on TEA-21 legislation, it is important to understand the institutional relationships thus formed and their strengths and limitations. Drawing from the literature as well as our own interviews in two dozen large metropolitan regions, in this paper we review the experience to date with partnerships under ISTEA. Five types of partnerships are identified, in order of increasing levels of interaction, shared responsibility, and role equality: consultation, coordination, cooperation, consensus building, and collaboration. We find that most MPO activities are of the first three types. Successes in lower-level partnerships can open doors for higher levels of partnership, but by no means assure it; partnerships have produced gains but they also have caused conflicts. Research on the social learning aspects of partnership development could provide insights into the evolution of regional institutions as well as useful models for progressive practice.

Introduction

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 assigned metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) substantial new decision-making responsibilities, along with new flexibility to develop transportation plans that meet their region's particular needs. It gave the larger MPOs decision-making authority that in most states had previously rested with state departments of transportation (DOTs) or highway departments, expanded the funds available for planning and programming, and increased funding flexibility.

At the same time, ISTEA greatly increased the responsibilities of MPOs. It required that MPOs consider a specified set of objectives, or planning factors, in their decisions; provided incentives for greater coordination with air quality planning; and insisted that plans and programs be "fiscally constrained"—that is, that funding sufficient for implementation be available or reasonably likely to become so. The Act also called for MPOs to coordinate with the state department of transportation on interregional projects, and mandated the substantial involvement of local governments, public and private interest groups, and the public in regional transportation deliberations.[1]

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ISTEA responded in large part to a growing clamor for greater devolution of transportation planning and programming (project selection) to the regional and local levels, where—it was argued—decisions could be made by those whose interests were most directly affected. In this view, state agencies would be participants in transportation decisions in the metropolitan regions, especially when highways were involved but transit operators, local planning and public works staff, ridesharing agencies, and other transport providers would play equally important roles. Further, local elected officials and their constituents would have a bigger say in project selection, scope and timing. Complex social, economic, and environmental issues would be accounted for through regional discussions, and competing interests would be balanced. The MPO would both serve as a forum for these discussions and, through its technical staff, would provide the information and analysis needed for an informed debate. Urban and metropolitan interests advanced this model of regional transportation planning as being far preferable to the highway-focused vision proffered by state DOTs and their allies. Environmentalists and social justice groups also favored the regional approach, and this view prevailed.

At the time ISTEA passed, however, many MPOs were ill equipped to carry out these responsibilities. Originally constituted as voluntary advisory bodies, few MPOs enjoyed a mandate from either the state or from local governments to exert real control over decision-making in transportation. Many lacked the technical expertise to perform the analyses and planning efforts that ISTEA envisioned for them. Although most MPO policy boards were composed of local elected officials, and MPO deliberations typically involved local public works staff, linkages with other local agencies tended to be limited or compartmentalized, and a hands-off attitude toward matters such as land use, housing, and economic development often prevailed. Similarly, relationships with other regional agencies tended to be limited and, in the case of air quality agencies, were often strained. Citizen and business interests were given opportunities to comment on the MPO's work, but few opportunities for hands-on participation were offered. It was clear that in order to implement ISTEA's vision of more cooperative transportation planning, and to begin to provide regional leadership on transportation planning, MPOs would need to develop new partnerships with other regional actors.

Almost from the time of ISTEA's passage, its overall approach and especially its reliance on MPOs were heavily contested by some states and other interests, who challenged the regional agencies' competence and legitimacy. The regional approach was equally strongly endorsed by other groups, especially planners, environmentalists, and urban interests. The resulting debate over MPO authority and action produced a rich body of studies and reports assessing MPO performance under

ISTEA, especially as the time for reauthorization of the surface transportation legislation approached.

In 1998 Congress passed ISTEA's successor legislation, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). TEA-21 streamlined certain planning requirements applying to the MPOs and altered funding categories, but continued the basic framework for metropolitan decision-making established by ISTEA, giving the MPOs lead responsibility but mandating partnerships with the states and other interests. One justification given for the continuance of this approach was the growing importance of regions as competitive units of the world economy.

In continuing the MPOs' lead role in transportation decision-making, Congress and the MPOs' supporters also were acting on a belief that the MPOs would be able to develop effective forums for discussion and partnerships for action on regional issues. As TEA-21 implementation proceeds, it is an appropriate time to examine the degree to which MPOs have developed these forums and partnerships over the past eight years.

In this paper, we review and evaluate what has been learned so far concerning metropolitan partnerships for planning under ISTEA. The paper draws upon the literature on the topic as well as the second author's in-depth interviews with MPO leaders and other interests in two dozen large metropolitan areas. We find that partnerships have been established, but they are mostly limited partnerships, emphasizing consultation and coordination. Examples of collaboration and consensus building, the kinds of partnerships deemed most desirable by MPOs' supporters, remain relatively rare. We conclude with suggestions on needed research.

History and Governance of MPOs

Metropolitan planning organizations' performance in response to the mandates of ISTEA must be understood in the context of their history and governance, which shaped the organizations' functions, staffing, and reputation in the regions that they serve.

With a few exceptions, metropolitan planning organizations were originally organized to respond to federal mandates and to capture federal funding opportunities. Many are also councils of government (COGs) and/or regional planning agencies. Their activities began in many regions with plans whose roots stretched back to the early years of the century. They were energized in the late 1950s and early 1960s with regional transportation studies utilizing new computer modeling technologies, surveys, and systems analysis techniques just then becoming widely available. These studies laid down the precedent for a substantial emphasis on technical analysis at the regional level.

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962 set in motion the institutional

realignments that eventually led to MPOs having decision-making responsibility for transportation in metropolitan regions. Responding to urban interests, the 1962 Act called for the establishment of a "continuing, cooperative, coordinated" planning process carried out by representatives of local governments in metropolitan areas of over 50,000 population. Importantly, the '62 Act further mandated that no project be built in such a metropolitan area without the area's agreement, as expressed through its planning process and documents. At least on paper, this so-called "3-C" planning process gave urban regions a veto over highway projects—though it provided no mechanism for the regions to insist on the projects they wanted.

In practice, however, regional agencies often found that they had less control than the federal law might suggest. State officials controlled the matching funds needed to obtain federal projects and could make acceptance of state-sponsored projects a condition of funding locally desired ones. In some regions state officials also sat on the 3-C planning committees, staffed the technical agencies, and worked with the legislature and highway commissions who held the ultimate authority at the state level. Thus, to further a regional agenda, metropolitan transportation agencies had to both coordinate local interests and achieve a workable agreement on the regional plan, and cooperate with the state highway department to get regional projects funded.[2]

Over the next three decades metropolitan planning organizations gained modest new responsibilities for transportation, although many also saw certain responsibilities slip away as federal funding for comprehensive planning disappeared. One important new responsibility was applied to MPOs under the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1977 and was continued under the 1990 amendments. In nonattainment areas, MPOs had responsibility for planning for transportation control measures and analysis of the conformity of transportation plans, programs, and projects to the State Implementation Plan. But overall, the mandate and funding for MPOs and regional planning generally diminished during this time. In order to survive in this climate, many MPOs took an entrepreneurial approach, taking on activities such as the provision of data or services to constituent governments (Atkins 1993). Some states also added responsibilities, giving MPOs financial oversight or responsibility to coordinate transportation and land use, for example. Still, the basic framework remained intact: a relatively weak regional institution representing the interests of local agencies and often dominated by the DOT.

Today most MPOs are structured as councils of government, comprised of representatives of all counties and/or municipalities in a region. Under ISTEA and TEA-21, new or redesignated MPOs must consist of representatives of local governments, agencies that "operate major modes of transportation" in the region (e.g. transit systems, ports,

airports), and "appropriate State officials." Existing MPOs are encouraged but not required to broaden their memberships (23 U.S.C. 134(b)).

In practice, geography-based representation dominates MPO boards: relatively few lend a primary role to transit agencies, ports, airports, environmental agencies, or other interests. In cases where transit, land use, environmental, or other agencies are granted seats on MPOs, they are very often excluded from voting. Regions that do include participation of modal and other interests on policy committees include Augusta (Georgia), Dallas/Ft. Worth, and the San Francisco Bay Area (U.S. ACIR 1997, 42-43).

Voting within MPOs is most commonly done on the basis of population, on a one-government-one-vote basis, or through a combination of the two. Among the 74 MPOs for which data is available, central cities are underrepresented in 68 and over-represented in only six (Benjamin *et al.* 1994).[3] About 18 MPOs compensate for this inequity in full or in part through weighted voting procedures. In California, the two largest MPOs use voting systems that approximate proportional representation (one person-one vote); however, the thirteen smaller California MPOs deviate much more sharply from proportionality (Lewis and Sprague 1997, 37-47).

The lack of representativeness of MPO boards may pose a real obstacle to their ability to acquire strong powers for regional governance. It recently caused the demise of one of the country's leading multipurpose regional agencies: Seattle's Metropolitan Municipal Council was disbanded because of a 1990 ruling that its governance structure violated the constitutional principle of one person-one vote (Wallis 1994a). Only Portland (Oregon) provides for public election of representatives to its regional council. Its MPO is a distinct organization with a COG-like structure. The policy committees for the Albany (NY) and Nashville MPOs overcome concerns about representation by emphasizing consensus-based decision-making (U.S. ACIR 1997, 42-43).

An important recent catalyst in the transformation of the governance capacities of MPOs has been the fiscal constraint provisions of ISTEA. Under these rules, states and MPOs must identify specific funding sources for all projects in their short-term Transportation Improvement Plans (TIPs) and longer-range transportation plans (23 U.S.C. 134(g) and (h)). Before ISTEA, statewide and metropolitan planning efforts often produced project lists far out of proportion to the available funds, leaving final decisions on which projects would move forward to implementing agencies and politicians. In addition, air quality plans based on these inflated project lists would predict emissions levels far below what could realistically be achieved. ISTEA's financial constraint requirements sought to strengthen transportation planning processes

by ensuring that they offered a credible basis for decision-making.

A survey of over 200 MPOs conducted a few years after ISTEA's passage found that the fiscal constraint requirement was the MPOs' most difficult challenge (Gage and McDowall 1995, 144-145), a finding echoed by a more recent study (Bishop *et al.* 1997). MPOs reported that their greatest hurdle was learning to manage the political process necessary to gain agreement on project priorities and develop support for new local revenue sources. But many faced technical challenges as well. Not having responsibility for construction or operations, few had the expertise to estimate costs for specific projects, as they now needed to do. They also had difficulties obtaining long-range funding commitments from local governments, and negotiating or managing private sector "matches" (Turnbull 1995, 46). Some found their state DOTs uncooperative when collaboration was necessary on tax revenue projections and other matters (interviews 1998-99).

Nonetheless, when the transportation legislation was up for Congressional reauthorization, most MPOs strongly supported the continuation of the fiscal constraint requirement (GAO 1996, 21-22.) In our interviews with representatives of the largest MPOs, all supported the requirement, though many also continued to develop a plan alternative that was not fiscally constrained, as a way of envisioning what could be done with higher levels of funding. The MPOs' support for the fiscal constraint requirement was largely due to the added authority that it gave them. The MPOs believe that fiscal constraint impelled them to take new leadership roles in their regions, while becoming advocates for their regions at the state level; it has played an important part in helping MPOs gain the capacity to set priorities and move from an advisory to a decision-making role. Other researchers have pointed out that it also provided an incentive for MPOs to begin searching for new local revenue options, and in the process, raised consciousness among elected officials about long-term financial needs (Lewis and Sprague 1997, 60-62, 66; GAO 1996, 22; Bishop *et al.* 1997). This increased understanding of transportation needs has extended to other areas, such as a greater emphasis on maintaining existing infrastructure (Lewis and Sprague 1997, 53).

In our interviews with representatives of MPOs, many of our informants commented that ISTEA's fiscal constraint requirement was a far stronger motivation for partnering with state and local agencies than were ISTEA's provisions for cooperation and participation. Partnerships to resolve funding issues were seen as absolutely necessary, whereas partnerships to broaden participation and interest representation were dubbed a "good idea" but "just one more thing to do", as one respondent put it. Ironically, several MPOs reported that their greatest ISTEA implementation problem at the present time is pressure from interest groups (especially environmentalists and community-based

groups) wanting a bigger role in transportation decisions than the MPO's leadership (elected officials and staff) are ready to offer. In turn, the interest group representatives also see their relationship with the MPO as less than they had hoped for.

Partnerships

While neither ISTEA nor TEA-21 explicitly uses the term "partnership", the term has come into widespread use to describe the relationships between MPOs and other agencies at the state and local levels, as well as their relationships with the private sector, interest groups, and even the public. Hence it is important to examine what is meant by partnerships, to consider how partnerships can be evaluated, and to reflect on their significance for regional planning. Specifically, do partnerships as they are developing offer any potential for innovative regional planning and decision-making?

Why Focus on Partnerships?

MPOs have significant budgets for transportation planning and they have been granted decision-making authority over vast pools of funds for infrastructure investments. They also have responsibility for evaluating and helping to manage certain impacts of regional transportation systems, including congestion and air quality. Yet their mandate is incomplete: most do not have any authority over land use (except to help forecast it) and their role in economic development is mostly an indirect one resulting from their infrastructure and services investments. Further, MPOs have been left to their own devices to build organizations capable of working effectively with state and local governments, other regional agencies, the private sector, and other non-governmental organizations, all of which have a stake in the outcome of the MPOs' activities.

Given the extreme reluctance among most state legislatures to grant regional agencies strong powers, it can be argued that the aggressive pursuit of partnerships represents MPOs' best hope for being able to fulfill their roles under ISTEA, or expand those roles to create a broader forum for regional development. Allan Wallis (1994b) notes that recently, strong new regional agencies have tended to gain their power through an incremental process of establishing legitimacy and building capacity. First, a coalition of citizens' organizations, business groups, and/or a region council of governments defines a policy concern of strategic interest to the region, documents the patterns and trends inherent in the problem, and invites a broad range of stakeholders to participate in developing strategies to address it. This consensus-building process includes an assessment of the region's technical, civic, and political capacities for implementing the agreed vision, and the adoption of an action plan for meeting any identified gaps in these capacities.

Next, the group works to implement its action plan by strengthening existing institutions (or creating new ones if necessary), leveraging resources from outside the region, and promoting policy mechanisms that link the region as a whole more closely together. Care is taken to ensure that the agency taking the lead in addressing the problem possesses strong facilitation capacities and a willingness to play a leadership role in the region. To guarantee its continued legitimacy, the agency is set up to embrace ideals of transparency, participation, and accountability to the diverse stakeholders that empowered it. Finally, a system of monitoring or accounting is set up to track the issue over time and provide a means for addressing inequities that arise.

Partnerships thus are a critical means by which MPOs could develop greater leadership capacity, increase their effectiveness, and broaden their vision. In addition, partnerships can bring a wide variety of more specific benefits to MPOs. In our interviews, both MPO leaders and others cited better access to information and expertise and a broader base of support for action as major benefits from effective partnerships. By working closely with other agencies and organizations, MPOs should be able to draw upon their expertise regarding the planning process, local and regional politics, and interdisciplinary technical analysis. Partnerships should help broaden the range of issues and perspectives addressed in the transportation planning process, improving the quality of the final product, and broadening the political constituency for its implementation. Finally, they should create channels through which MPOs can influence decisions on other issues closely related to transportation (e.g. land use).

Defining Partnerships

While partnerships are widely discussed, the term is applied to a range of relationships. What, exactly, is a partnership? Hathaway and Wormser define it broadly as "debate and choices made jointly by a variety of governmental and nongovernmental entities" (1993, 36). In contrast, in her well-known paper on citizen participation, Arnstein (1969) distinguished partnerships from lower levels of engagement; partnership, in her view, required the sharing of significant power.

A number of different terms are used to describe different forms of partnerships among public agencies. Unfortunately, these terms are often applied somewhat interchangeably, so in practice the distinctions among them can be quite murky. Nonetheless, several are defined under federal law (23 C.F.R. 450.104):

- *Consultation:* "one party confers with another identified party and, prior to taking action(s), considers that party's views."
- *Coordination:* "the comparison of the transportation plans, programs, and schedules of one agency with related plans,

programs and schedules of other agencies or entities with legal standing, and adjustment of plans, programs and schedules to achieve general consistency."

- *Cooperation:* "the parties involved in carrying out the planning, programming and management systems processes work together to achieve a common goal or objective."

When multiple parties are involved (particularly in processes that include the public and/or non-governmental organizations), more advanced forms of cooperation may be practiced. Loosely following Healey's descriptions of these emerging approaches to governance (1997, 235-239), possible definitions for these include:

- *Consensus-building:* entrepreneurial network building among "key" players toward agreement and adoption of a common strategic policy agenda, often with a focus on institution building.
- *Collaboration:* a form of consensus-building with a strong emphasis on including the full range of stakeholders, and establishing forums in which all participants have rights, responsibilities and opportunities to express their ideas and values. Healey calls this "inclusionary argumentation."

In this paper, we have chosen a definition that is focused on shared responsibility and authority: a *partnership* is a working relationship between two organizations in which the lead organization yields some degree of control over a planning or decision-making process in exchange for another's expertise and/or political support. This definition excludes activities that do not involve much interaction, such as the numerous Federal requirements for such interagency "coordination" and "consultation". It also excludes the lower levels of public involvement: Federal law often requires agencies to open their decisions up for public notice and comment, but these are rarely allow a free and open public debate of the issues. Finally, because we focus on planning and policy, we also have chosen to omit several other specific relationships focused on implementation, such as the diverse range of public-private partnerships used to finance or build projects (or provide services) after key policy decisions have been made.

Evaluating Partnerships

Deciding what makes an effective partnership requires attention to evaluation criteria. Conventionally, a policy is evaluated by examining how efficiently and effectively—and perhaps how equitably—it has achieved its objectives. ISTEA, however, did not state explicit objectives for partnerships (or participation), but merely mandated that they occur. The law created interdependent decision-making structures and required broader participation, but did not specify performance criteria against

which the new planning processes were to be judged.

Healey (1997) proposes several criteria for the evaluation of participatory planning processes. First, rather than judging planning efforts based on progress toward a predetermined goal or outcome, she urges that the focus should be on whether its results are qualitatively different than before—either in actual substance, or in the level of public acceptance. A second criterion is the extent to which new institutional linkages are developed, including cooperative relationships within governments, among governments, and between governments and private firms or organizations. A third measure is the degree to which a broad range of stakeholders is brought into the planning process.

Healey's "relational" criteria are helpful in evaluating MPOs' planning efforts under ISTEA. They allow each MPO to be judged on its own terms, without reference to a standardized model of how things should be done. By focusing on process changes rather than specific outcomes, evaluation problems posed by differences in context and in time frame are also reduced. Nevertheless, as Healey notes, changes in actual substance and in public acceptance also can be critically important.

In our interviews we found that few MPOs had formally evaluated their own performance under ISTEA, and even fewer had devised explicit criteria for assessing the partnerships they established. Asked to discuss how well they felt their new relationships were working, responses often focused on timeliness, complexity, and satisfaction. In the words of one MPO executive, "Do the new arrangements slow down decisions? Do they require that more information be produced, or add steps to the process? Are they harder for non-experts to understand, or easier? Do people complain more or less than they did under earlier ways of doing things? A good process has to produce happier people if it is going to be more expensive or more complicated." Business leaders and environmental organizations, in contrast, frequently focused on substantive outcomes: Was more attention being paid to an issue that had previously gotten short shrift? Did the kinds of projects being put forward change? Upon reflection, many of those interviewed cited benefits that they would expect from successful partnerships, ranging from an ability to pool data and expertise to a greater sensitivity to user benefits and costs. They also said that effective partnerships should broaden the political constituency for plan implementation, and create channels through which MPOs can seek influence other planning and decision-making processes on issues closely related to transportation (e.g. land use). The various comments suggest that the respondents are implicitly applying a combination of process and outcome criteria in their assessments of MPO partnerships.

MPO Transportation Planning Partnerships since ISTEA

Interagency Partnerships

One set of challenges facing MPOs since the passage of ISTEA has been the development of new working relationships with other public agencies. In many cases, longstanding ties have needed to change to accommodate MPOs' new authority and responsibilities. This has not happened easily.

Under federal law and regulations, MPOs are required to negotiate formal memoranda of understanding (MOUs) delineating their roles relative to state departments of transportation, air quality agencies, transit agencies, Indian nations, other MPOs or multi-state organizations in the same region, and the region's freight industry. Overall, federal performance reviews have found that MPOs have been slow to develop these MOUs. Reviewers attributed this slowness to a hesitancy to undertake the potentially politically difficult negotiations (U.S. ACIR 1997, 43-44). Relations with state transportation agencies, other regional agencies, local land use agencies, and transit operators were mentioned by most of our respondents when asked about changes in the MPO's interagency ties.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCIES

ISTEA marked a significant shift in decision-making authority from DOTs to MPOs. It placed MPOs in charge of developing transportation plans and programs within metropolitan regions with populations exceeding 200,000, but directed them to work "in cooperation" with their state governments. The MPO and the Governor must jointly approve transportation improvement plans, metropolitan planning area boundaries, and other key decisions. In federal parlance, "cooperation" implies a higher degree of interaction than simple "coordination". However, the specifics of this cooperation are left for the MPO and the state to negotiate (23 C.F.R. 450.312(a)).

Available evidence from the literature and our own research suggest that MPOs and state DOTs are only now beginning to discover how to make their new relationship operate effectively. As recently as 1995, MPOs generally gave poor ratings (an average of 3.07 on a scale of 1 to 10) to their relationships with state DOTs (Gage and McDowell 1995, 148-149). Well into the mid-1990s, some states continued to resist granting MPOs their full statutory role in the transportation planning process, either by refusing to allocate federal funds to them or by dominating voting power within them (GAO 1996, 25). In five states, including Virginia and North Carolina, governors delegated veto power over MPO decisions to their state DOTs, effectively undermining MPO authority (Prendergast 1994, 41). The New York State DOT directly controlled the staff of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Commission, hampering the regional agency's ability to operate

independently, reducing the full participation of local officials, and preventing the agency from taking a true leadership role in its region (Lyons 1996b, 9-11). In several other cases (e.g. Milwaukee), MPOs have been given only partial project selection authority.

Over time, state opposition to MPOs' greater authority appears to have waned somewhat. Federal reviews leveraged increased compliance with ISTEA mandates in several instances, and some states gave up their resistance to an increased MPO role after losing the battle to unseat the MPOs in TEA-21. Nevertheless, several key states continue to object to a greater MPO role and are already preparing their critiques for use in the next Congressional authorization of transportation legislation.

Although many states have been unhappy about MPOs' new authority under federal law, some have seen it as advantageous. In California, the increased role for the MPOs came about through state legislation. California laws sharply increase the proportion of state funds over which MPOs have decision-making authority, as well as local and regional capacities to raise new revenues for transportation. The state DOT continues to produce statewide plans and remains in charge of planning outside the metropolitan regions and for operations and new technologies. The MPOs are not, however, in a clear lead position, as California legislation further delegates substantial decision-making authority to county-level agencies. Coordination of the disparate county plans falls to the MPOs, and most have established new committees or panels to handle this task.

A few states appear to have seized on the ISTEA and TEA-21 mandates as an opportunity to improve regional planning. Minnesota is a prime example. "Area Transportation Partnerships" have been established to help forge consensus within regions. Similar "partnerships" have been established between regions and the state government (Lowe 1994). Discussions with both state and regional interests indicate that these new relationships are viewed with favor by DOT personnel as well as by regional and local groups.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER MPOS

In many metropolitan regions, planning and decision-making is divided among several organizations dubbed "MPOs" despite their less-than-regional jurisdiction. Some of the regions with multiple MPOs extend across more than one state, including New York (3 MPOs) and Philadelphia (4 MPOs). Others are simply regions that to date have not developed institutions scoped to the regional level and rely instead on county or other sub-regional agencies. This latter group includes Tampa-St. Petersburg (4 MPOs) and Charlotte (5 MPOs). In ISTEA and TEA-21, Congress has chosen to allow this fragmentation to continue, rather than requiring that a single MPO be named with

jurisdiction corresponding to the entire economic region. Federal rules furthermore set a very low standard for interaction among MPOs within a region. They must cooperate only for the purpose of establishing their relative roles and jurisdictions; otherwise, they need only consult and coordinate in their preparation of individual "regional" plans (23 C.F.R. 450.312(e)).

Respondents with experience in these sub-regional MPOs see both advantages and disadvantages to the arrangement. On one hand, in the multi-state regions, having separate agencies in each state certainly simplifies state-MPO relationships, both legal and institutional. It also appears to enable the sub-regional MPOs to address the transportation needs of key corridors or areas in some detail, and to respond to local political issues. For example, Northern New Jersey's MPO has been able to focus on problems and opportunities in its area with an attention to detail that might not have been possible if it were integrated into a larger body covering the entire New York metropolitan area. Sub-regional approaches also may be a way to handle sub-regional differences in very large and complex single-state regions, such as the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Because needs, priorities, and values are quite different in different parts of this vast region, the Southern California Association of Governments has chosen to act as multiple MPOs and delegate much of its decision-making responsibilities to 13 subdistricts.

Potential drawbacks of these sub-regional arrangements also must be recognized. Probably the biggest concern is that the arbitrary state and county political boundaries that divide regions internally tend to bear little relationship to actual travel patterns, and are often a poor basis for subdividing the task of transportation planning. As a result, limiting an MPO's boundaries to a single state or county within a larger region may undermine its effectiveness and its credibility.

The sub-regional MPOs might be able to avoid this if they can work together to develop an overall regional strategy. At the very least, coordination is necessary to ensure connectivity of the transportation system. But higher-level partnerships are necessary to establish common goals, to set joint priorities, and to effectively follow through with programs and projects that respond to regional opportunities.

Our interviews suggest that the realities fall far short of this ideal. Several respondents indicated that, far from cooperating, the sub-regional MPOs see themselves as competitors. They compete for development, for discretionary federal and state funds, and for advantages for their own constituents. Few incentives for greater cooperation exist, our respondents report.

Nevertheless, in some metropolitan areas with multiple MPOs, voluntary partnerships among the MPOs have emerged and are beginning to produce joint policies (Marshall and Mierzejewski 1997,

18). How widespread such partnering might be is unclear, however, as there has been no systematic assessment of these partnerships.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH REGIONAL AIR QUALITY AGENCIES

In the many metropolitan regions that have yet to attain national ambient air quality standards, MPOs must treat air quality as a key consideration in their planning processes. MPOs in nonattainment areas are required to develop memoranda of understanding with air quality agencies regarding their roles and responsibilities; MPOs, air agencies, states, and transit operators are encouraged to specify their relative responsibilities in a single cooperative agreement (23 C.F.R. 450.310). MPOs also have specific assignments under the Clean Air Act's conformity requirement, which requires agreement in content and effect between transportation and air quality plans.

In our discussions with them, many environmental groups said they had thought that because of conformity rule, closer working relationships between MPOs and air quality management districts would develop over time. What seems to be occurring, however, is not the emergence of true partnerships, but rather arms-length coordination to comply with the letter of the law.

For the most part, transportation and air quality planning have remained parallel processes. The air quality agency typically has taken the lead in developing emissions inventories and setting emissions budgets for transportation; transportation agencies rarely have done much more than comment on this process. The transportation agencies then take the lead on developing the measures for emissions reductions through transportation, except for vehicle and fuel technology options which usually remain under the air agency's purview.[4] Conflicts over the results of these largely separate processes have marred relationships between transportation agencies and air quality agencies. In a number of regions, the history of conflicts stretches back to the 1970s, and the scars from these conflicts have been slow to heal.

Many MPOs feel that they have been given insufficient voice in the state implementation plans (SIPs) and SIP revisions being developed by state air quality agencies. This sense of disenfranchisement is mutual: many state air quality agencies feel that they need a greater role in MPOs' development of regional transportation control measures (FHWA 1996, 22-26). Air quality agencies told us that, as they see it, many of the transportation agencies they deal with take little affirmative responsibility for improving air quality and continue to support and promote measures that will increase auto use to the detriment of cleaner air. In turn, several of the MPOs stated that the actions suggested by air agency staff, mostly demand management and constraints on highway expansion, were politically unpopular as well as ineffective. Both the Clean Air Act and

transportation legislation make it necessary for these agencies to work together at times but the relationships remain chilly.

According to an American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) survey conducted soon after the passage of ISTEA, only 12% of MPOs provided for air quality agency representation on policy or project selection committees (AASHTO 1992). However, one-third of the MPOs had technical committees whose membership included air quality agencies. A Federal Highway Administration study characterized these technical committees as nearly universally successful and beneficial, helping planners in both agencies identify and solve problems earlier in the planning process and at lower organizational levels (FHWA 1996). For example, California interagency working groups on conformity have helped the state and MPOs to reach agreement on how conformity analyses will be done and have served as a forum for discussion of "difficult" projects, helping to manage and resolve conflict. In some cases interested citizens, environmentalists, and business interests have been seated on the conformity groups and have been party to their discussions and agreements (*ibid.*, 18-22; U.S. ACIR 1997, 59; interviews for this study).

The FHWA study found, however, that successful cooperation on conformity is far from universal. For example, a federal planning review praised Dallas for investing substantial resources in its conformity effort and addressing air quality "at many levels of the planning process" (Lyons 1996c, 20), but criticized Miami's conformity process as "more of an 'after-the-fact' test...than part of the project selection process" (Lyons 1996a, 23). A TRB study had similarly mixed findings, reporting that "many MPOs are experiencing great difficulty in coordinating and communicating with [other] agencies" on this topic, and complain that "meeting the conformity requirements is viewed as an afterthought" by the other government agencies with whom they must work (Humphrey 1995, 7-8). The Transportation Research Board study concluded that overall, the conformity requirement had "resulted in a renewed and reinvigorated planning process" (*ibid.*, 9), but added that "more extensive political cooperation is needed" to develop plans that address air quality concerns, particularly with regard to urban/suburban investment tradeoffs. Our own work suggests that the successes are largely limited to cooperation on technical issues and that partnerships have yet to be created at a high enough level to significantly affect policy direction.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL LAND USE AGENCIES

Federal law does not explicitly direct MPOs to develop linkages with local land use planning efforts or to give land use agencies a formal role in the transportation planning process. In fact, the ISTEA

provision that included consistency between transportation and land use plans as one of 16 metropolitan planning factors was dropped from TEA-21's streamlined list of seven planning factors. TEA-21 did include a new program to encourage the formation of partnerships to integrate transportation and land-use decision-making.

The local elected officials that make up the majority of most MPO boards do, of course, represent land use and development concerns at the MPO. For the most part, their interests are expressed as support for specific projects needed to ease congestion or facilitate new development. Only a handful of regions have taken a strategic look at the role of transportation investment and management in the broader regional economy or as a regional quality of life issue. For most MPOs the analysis of regional economic development and population expansion is done to produce the background data for evaluating transportation system performance and project needs, rather than to identify regional economic development opportunities or evaluate alternative land use patterns and growth options.

Most MPOs have had a difficult time (where they have tried at all) in gaining an influential voice in either broader regional growth debates or in local land use decisions. For the most part, the local government officials that constitute most MPO governing boards have shown little interest in changing this situation. Land use planning has long been a tightly held prerogative of local or county governments, and regional approaches are often viewed as threats to local autonomy. Indeed, some MPOs originated as cooperative regional efforts designed to protect against the establishment of regional planning entities by state governments (Nelson Wikstrom, *Councils of Government* 1977, 43-44 as cited by Lewis and Sprague 1997, 36). Transportation decisions are dealt with by regional forums because their impacts are typically multi-jurisdictional, but most transportation agencies have been expected to plan in response to, not as part of, land development plans. Even in Portland, Oregon, where a directly elected metropolitan government has land use responsibilities, the region's MPO is a separate functional body with a COG structure. This division of responsibilities has complicated the integration of land use and transportation planning in the region (Adler and Edner 1992).

While localism remains a strong force, MPO roles in land use planning nevertheless are slowly growing. Zoning is handled at a regional level in only 6% of the cases (AASHTO 1992), but in nine states (Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington), MPOs have specific responsibilities for growth management or land use planning under state law (U.S. ACIR 1995, 34). In several of these states and in a dozen or so additional metropolitan regions, regional growth boundaries delineate the areas where development is focused and the MPOs have a role in some

aspects of boundary setting, land demand forecasting, or permit allocation. Many other MPOs work with local governments in tracking development permits, determining housing needs, and forecasting school demand, activities that often help determine state funding allocations to the localities. In our interviews, several MPOs said that these forecasting responsibilities were creating new linkages with local governments. In AASHTO's survey, accounting for this wider range of land use activities boosted the share of MPOs that said they play some role in land use decisions to 70%. In addition, 37% said there was a mechanism for regional review and concurrence in land use decisions, and 36% reported having a growth management plan (AASHTO 1992). Informal discussions with national organizations representing MPOs suggest that MPO land use involvement has grown in the years since the AASHTO survey.

MPOs also have continued to strengthen their ties with local land use planning. A recent study found a few cases in which MPO staff are working closely with locally based land use planning efforts, citing Toledo, Denver, and Quad Cities (Iowa/Illinois) as examples (U.S. ACIR 1997, 35, 45). In our interviews, several additional MPOs, including San Francisco, San Diego, and St. Louis, reported having close relations with land use planners on specific projects, ranging from downtown redevelopment to neighborhood revitalization to port expansion. Beyond this, many MPOs have included land use agency staff on their various advisory committees and working groups and use this as a way to coordinate activities to some degree.

Still, few regions can point to more than the occasional collaborative land use-transportation planning effort, and in many regions environmentalists, community activists, and some elements of the business community see the continuing separation of land use and transportation planning activities as a major failure of leadership. In our interviews, these groups expressed great frustration that relatively little was being done to think and plan strategically for growth, with transportation used as a tool for improving local and regional quality of life and economic competitiveness. Efforts are underway in several states to promote legislation for a stronger land use-transportation planning and policy linkage at the regional level.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH TRANSIT AGENCIES

Until recently, most transit projects were developed in processes largely separate from those for highway projects and transit agencies relationships with MPOs and other transportation providers were narrowly drawn. Transit agencies were thrust into more direct relationships with their MPOs as a result of changes in finance introduced by federal legislation, including reductions in federal subsidies for transit operations and the ISTEA requirement for financially

constrained plans. Several of the new funding categories in ISTEA were available for transit projects, both capital and operating, but could be secured only through competition in the overall planning and programming processes. This was a change for many transit operators, who previously operated much more independently, relying on a combination of funds allocated by formula and direct capital grants from Washington. It also was a change for many MPOs, who found themselves scrutinizing transit cost data to a far greater extent than they had previously done. In a number of regions, the resulting changes in relationships have been uneasy, our interviews found.

Some transit agencies already had seats on the MPO board, though in many cases their role was *ex officio*. At most MPOs, however, transit agencies were engaged primarily at the staff level, helping develop the transit element of regional plans, participating in multimodal corridor studies, and providing lists of projects for shorter-term programs. With ISTEA, many more transit agencies have sought a formal role on the MPO board and a share of the decision-making on planning and programming. MPOs' responses to these requests have been mixed, especially in areas where there is more than one transit operator, and the role that transit operators should play in MPO decisions remains a bone of contention in several areas. Current arrangements are mostly of the consult and coordinate type rather than full collaborative partnerships.

Non-Governmental Partnerships

In addition to cooperation with other government entities there is the broader question of MPO relationships with other stakeholders, including interested citizens, organized interest groups, and the private sector. Beyond the task of forging working relationships where none existed before, MPOs must in this case also wrestle with difficult questions concerning the proper role of government. In particular, the push for greater partnerships with nongovernmental organizations and private business concerns raises questions about possible conflicts, and about the role of the elected officials on the MPO board in speaking for the public interest.

Although federal law does require the MPOs to open their decision-making processes up to public participation, it was not initially specific about how far this participation must go. ISTEA simply directed metropolitan planning organizations to "provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation, and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment" on transportation plans. TEA-21 added freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, and representatives of users of public transit to this list. It also modified the wording to "a reasonable notice of and opportunity to comment."

Subsequent federal regulations have elaborated upon the legislative language, stating that MPOs must adopt "a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and TIPs." The regulations also require this process to "seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to low-income and minority households" (23 C.F.R. 450.316).

Access to information, consultation, and communication fall short of the say in decisions that many outside interests have been seeking. Considerable discussion has revolved around what it means for citizens to be "involved" in developing plans and programs. For many MPOs, involvement has meant offering stakeholders seats on planning and advisory committees, and offering the general public access to make suggestions and comments at open workshops and meetings. For at least some nongovernmental organizations, this is not enough.

Most MPOs have long made extensive use of committees to address transportation needs in particular geographic areas or corridors and to consider specific issues such as air quality or transit coordination. With the passage of ISTEA and again with the passage of TEA-21, many MPOs established additional committees or working groups to address topics raised in the legislation, such as freight, public transit, welfare-to-work, and bicycle and pedestrian concerns. While these committees or working groups play important roles in bringing stakeholders into the planning process, they potentially suffer from some key flaws. First, just as geographically based committees draw most of their membership from the areas under study, the topical committees' membership tends to be drawn from advocates and administrators of the programs under consideration. This essentially positions each committee as a sanctioned advocacy group, allowing the group to set internal priorities and develop an argument for attention to their interests, but limiting the ability of group members to consider their proposals in a broader regional context or to engage in tradeoffs among programs. The interest orientation of the groups also has tended to limit membership to proponents, than those who are critics of the program or activity under consideration. For example, most transit groups are composed of transit operators and riders but few critics of transit subsidy levels; most freight advisory committees represent shippers and carriers but lack representation from community or environmental organizations concerned about the noise generated by freight operations. Furthermore, because the participants in these advisory committees lack direct membership in the MPO's board, their ability to influence funding decisions is unclear. To date, the available evidence indicates mixed success in moving the recommendations of advisory groups into the regions' transportation

plans and programs leading some to question the efficacy of the approach or its underlying purposes.

CITIZEN ROLES

There have been conflicting assessments of the extent to which MPOs are opening up their planning processes to greater involvement by interested citizens. A 1996 survey by the General Accounting Office concluded that many MPOs have embraced a greater role for the public in the planning process. Many MPOs had discovered that public participation, while costly, can also produce significant time and resource savings in the long run by reducing the risk of litigation or political opposition. The survey found universal support for ISTEA's public participation requirements among the MPOs interviewed (GAO 1996, 16-19). It is not clear, however, that this positive attitude is actually as deeply held as the GAO findings might suggest or that it has translated into increased partnership activity. A different study concluded that, "there is not yet... widespread enthusiastic support for public involvement at either state or MPO levels.... In many states and MPOs, it still appears to be 'business as usual." (Hoover 1994, 51.) Also, in Federal performance reviews conducted as part of the MPO certification process, 71% of MPOs were given recommendations that they improve their public participation procedures (U.S. ACIR 1997, 70).

In contrast to the MPOs, who at least speak favorably about participation, state transportation agencies have been strongly critical of ISTEA's public participation procedures. AASHTO has argued that the requirements act as "more of a lightning rod calling for public activism rather than providing an opportunity for citizens to voice their interests." The organization further asserted that the costs of satisfying the requirements are "exceedingly high" while the benefits provided are "minimal" (AASHTO 1996a, 29).

The degree of effort applied to drawing the public into the planning process has clearly varied widely, as have the techniques employed. Several reports have documented notable efforts and strategies to increase public involvement in metropolitan transportation planning (Hathaway and Wormser 1993; Unsworth 1994; NARC 1995). Whether these efforts are taking hold on a widespread basis remains to be investigated, as does their efficacy or impact.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH ORGANIZED STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Closely related to the issue of public participation is the degree to which MPOs open their planning processes to participation by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or individuals representing organized interests (e.g., environmental groups, representatives of labor). Former AASHTO president Francis Francois observes efforts to broaden participation in metropolitan planning processes to include all relevant stakeholders have been slow and difficult, in part because

MPO boards have been organized around jurisdiction or geography rather than interest, (Turnbull 1995, 10). Similarly, Alan Winn of Crain and Associates notes that in his experience, few MPOs "viewed [participation of] special interest groups as an opportunity to help advance intermodal goals and objectives" (*ibid.*, 31). Instead, many have seen it as risky business.

In our own interviews, we found that many MPOs are leery of too much involvement by organized stakeholders, seeing it as running a risk of giving such participants undue influence. Others expressed concerns that allowing nongovernmental organizations a greater voice might raise their expectations for change, only to have them be disappointed and angry if the change they desire does not occur. Several MPOs said they worried that—far from developing shared understanding and respect—participation by these organizations might simply give them inside information which they could then use in lawsuits against the MPO or its associates. These MPOs argue that NGOs should participate in the same manner as individual citizens rather than from privileged positions.

Actual experience in working with NGOs has been mixed. In some cases, the relationship between NGOs and MPOs started out litigious but ended up a true cooperative partnership. 1000 Friends of Oregon and Portland Metro have shared analyses and built upon one another's studies. In other cases, litigation has followed when attempts to sway regional agency plans had failed. In Atlanta, litigation led to a major reorganization of regional transportation and land use planning, including the creation of a powerful new transportation authority, though the roles that NGOs will have in future policy making is as yet unclear. In still other cases, NGOs have been denied access to basic models and data being used by the MPO, partly because the state and MPO fear the NGOs would use this information to contest decisions and possibly to pursue litigation. New York City has been in this situation.

While conflicts have been real, nongovernmental organizations also have worked to create new opportunities for cooperation with MPOs and state DOTs. For example, Surface Transportation Policy Project's (STPP) Partner State Program was designed to show that NGOs and government agencies can work together for mutual benefit. STPP provided technical and practical assistance helping State DOTs and MPOs in six states implement ISTEA's reforms, and in exchange, states agreed to give STPP greater access to their planning processes (Dittmar and Bender 1994). These experiences indicate that mutually satisfactory arrangements are possible, but more analysis is needed before conclusions can be drawn about long term efficacy.

PRIVATE SECTOR ROLES

The freight industry's growing interest in intermodalism was largely responsible for the prominent role given to the intermodal planning

concept in ISTEA, and for most MPOs, private sector involvement in transportation planning has meant engaging the region's freight industry on these intermodal issues. Ironically, however, in many regions the freight sector has been slow to voice its interests in metropolitan transportation planning processes (Adcock 1994), and MPO leadership has frequently been reluctant to seek a broader role for freight.

Most MPOs are relatively inexperienced in working on freight issues. Major intermodal facilities such as airports and seaports are typically the responsibility of separate authorities that coordinate with the MPOs on access issues only as needs arise. Most MPOs have focused their attention on passenger transport issues and even the largest MPOs only recently initiated detailed studies of regional goods movement. MPOs' elected official boards rarely champion freight issues; their energies more typically are focused on projects needed in their own jurisdictions, and freight issues are largely hidden from local view except in the cases where negative impacts such as truck traffic in neighborhoods become a community issue. Further, large-scale intermodal freight projects often appear unattractive to the local officials that comprise MPOs because they have concentrated negative local impacts even if their regional benefits are large. Freight-serving projects also may raise complex issues of finance, taxation, and liability, with which neither MPO staff nor board members have much experience. Finally, MPOs are understandably hesitant to be seen supporting public financing for projects perceived to largely benefit particular private companies.

Another legal, institutional, and resource constraint on intermodal planning by MPOs is the continuing modal separation in the organization of Federal and state departments of transportation. The focusing of staff, regulations, and funding on individual modes creates tremendous inertia against multi-modal or intermodal planning at all levels of government. Also, since large intermodal projects often have implications for more than one economic region, state DOTs' hesitance to work cooperatively with their MPOs has made many intermodal projects difficult to consider at all (Crain & Associates 1996; Leibson and Penner 1996; NCIT 1994; Hauser and Breese 1997).

Only a few MPOs—including Chicago, Northern New Jersey, Pittsburgh, Portland, and Seattle—currently include representatives from ports, airports, or railroads on their governing boards. In Florida, the question of whether ports can be members of MPOs has been a point of legal debate and controversy (Leibson and Penner 1996). It is more common for freight interests to be invited to participate on MPOs advisory committees, but many of the same issues that arise concerning NGO roles apply as well for private transport providers. Also, many freight operators appear to find the deliberate pace and technical style of planning practiced by most MPOs to be at odds with their own

interests and time schedules. Some MPOs have had a hard time keeping freight operators at the table for more than a meeting or two.

Nonetheless, innovative intermodal partnerships are beginning to emerge. ISTEA contained no specific authorization to finance rail freight projects, so advocates turned to creative financing: adding a passenger rail component to build support, using CMAQ funds, etc. (Buxbaum 1994, 50). Several key rail freight projects—including the Alameda Corridor in Los Angeles and the Howland Hook Marine Terminal in New York—are being funded with minimal federal assistance but substantial partnership funding from state and local governments and private user fees (Wilner 1996). Philadelphia included freight industry officials as partners in their planning process, and as a result, convinced decision-makers to include several freight projects in federal- and state-funded programs (Leibson and Penner 1996). Other cooperative efforts at data collection and project selection have been documented in Baltimore, Chicago, and Monterey (Fischer 1996; Plumeau and Jones 1998; Zavattero *et al.* 1998). These achievements suggest that under the clearer guidance and funding for intermodal freight investments provided by TEA-21, many more such partnerships may emerge in the future.

Putting the Pieces Together

A number of MPOs appear to have put many of these pieces together and developed strong multidimensional partnerships among agencies, NGOs, private organizations, and the interested public. One often-cited model is the Metropolitan Council of Minneapolis/St. Paul, which is structured to provide strong citizen and interagency involvement in shaping the region's transportation priorities. A federal review of its planning process commended the Metropolitan Council for its commitment to citizen and business community participation and for its outreach efforts to minority communities and other nontraditional stakeholders (Lyons 1993). Portland's Metropolitan Council is another commonly cited approach but its creation through state-mandate means that its replication is largely out of the hands of regional leadership.

In the San Francisco region, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission has created the Bay Area Partnership to build consensus among state and local transportation and air quality agencies, private sector interests, transit operators, and other agencies, and has achieved a fairly high level of cooperation with regard to project evaluation and legislative initiatives. However, MTC has been criticized for using a separate advisory council to solicit participation of community, business, environmental, academic, minority, elderly, and disabled organizations, rather than including more citizen representation within the Bay Area Partnership itself (Lyons 1996d, 20-21). Our own observations of the region suggest that the Partnership itself has achieved agreement over

projects, but not over larger policy issues of growth and development, topics it has mostly avoided so far.

Among the other examples cited in the literature are state-regional-local strategic partnerships created in St. Louis, and partnerships with sectoral and private sector in Orlando (Andrews 1996). The examples indicate that new participants are being brought in and new procedures are emerging. But the substantive impact of these changes remains to be evaluated, as does stakeholder satisfaction with the results.

Implications and Research Needs

In this paper, we have shown that metropolitan planning organizations' attempts at creating regional partnerships have produced mixed results. Classifying partnerships in order of increasing levels of interaction, shared responsibility and role equality as consultation, coordination, cooperation, consensus building, and collaboration, we find that most MPO activities are of the first three types. Consensus building and collaboration on transportation plans and programs do occur among local government members of the MPO but rarely characterize the relationships between the MPO and state agencies, or those in other functional areas of local government such as land use. MPO partnerships with the general public, organized stakeholder groups, and other private groups similarly tend to fall into the consultation and coordination categories. Cooperation is an occasional thing, and consensus building and collaboration are rare.

Despite the mixed results with partnerships to date, the range of policy demands being placed on metropolitan planning organizations continues to diversify and additional partnerships are being mandated. For example, following passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, TEA-21 provided incentive grants for the provision of transit services to assist urban welfare recipients reach suburban jobs (Sec. 3037). To receive funding for these programs, projects must be part of a "coordinated public transit-human services transportation planning process." This will require MPOs and transit agencies to develop new partnerships with governmental social service agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations. TEA-21's Transportation and Community and System Preservation Pilot Program (Sec. 1221) is another new grant program that encourages MPOs to cooperate with "non-traditional partners".

Several MPOs have already seized upon these programs as opportunities to provide regional leadership (Laube *et al.* 1997). Successes with these partnerships, in which the MPO can play the role of "good guy" by successfully securing federal funds and delivering them to constituents, may help build the relationships and legitimacy needed to tackle the more complex and difficult issues facing the region.

There is some evidence that an MPO's success in building a

partnership of any sort increases its subsequent ability to expand its partnership relations to other partners and topics, and to establish higher level relationships with at least some groups. This suggests that research on the social learning aspects of partnership development could provide insights into the evolution of regional institutions as well as useful models for progressive practice.

Still, the available evidence is that partnerships are not an easy matter when the various partners' goals are in conflict. Experience with transportation and air quality planning suggests that legislatively mandated relationships are an insufficient basis for mutual respect and cooperation, and conflict may continue to simmer rather than being resolved. Concerns over water quality, habitat preservation, growth management, climate change, and environmental justice are just some of the additional issues challenging the ability of our current planning institutions to think regionally, strategically, and multi-dimensionally. Efforts to build partnerships to address these issues are underway, but as has been the case with air quality, the relationships are often full of conflict. Further work on conflict resolution in the context of these regional issues could be helpful.

There is clearly a need to evaluate in a more systematic manner the circumstances under which regional partnerships work and under which they do not. At present, it is not clear whether the ability of MPOs to provide regional leadership through the formation of partnerships is a product of its size, stage of development, quality of leadership, social and political capital, other unique state or local conditions, or a combination of all of these.

Both the literature we have reviewed and our own work presented here point to the difficulty of assessing regional planning partnerships. The evidence to date suggests that results are qualitatively different than before and a broader range of stakeholders has been brought into the planning process. But questions persist about whether the actual substance of decisions has changed or whether in the absence of such substantive change public acceptance will really be improved. The evidence supports the conclusion that new institutional linkages have developed, but it is not clear that these linkages have actually reduced conflict or helped to manage it more productively. Clearly, more work is needed on this topic.

At the same time, it would be useful to consider what role public policy can play in encouraging stronger partnerships. An important set of questions concerns the role of the federal government. ISTEA revitalized the metropolitan planning process and TEA-21 kept on the same course. But it is clear that a stronger MPO role has not been universally accepted, and in a number of regions key actors, public and private, remain opposed to a strong MPO role. If MPOs are still struggling to form regional consensus or are resistant to changing their manner of

doing business, is there more that the federal government or anyone else can do to promote reform? Or does the continued difficulty suggest a weakness inherent in the attempt to build metropolitan capacity absent state or local desires for it?

Finally, a set of methodological questions emerges from the study. Most of the literature is based on individual cases, as was our own work for this study. Lessons learned from individual cases are certainly valuable for the regions being studied but do not easily resolve themselves into a clear picture when one steps back and tries to appraise the larger situation. The problem of case selection, strategic analysis, and interpretation needs to be addressed head-on if general conclusions about the role of MPOs in regional planning, and the role of partnerships in their efforts, are to be drawn from past and future work on MPOs.

Endnotes

[1] While all MPOs were affected by ISTEA planning provisions, MPOs in regions with populations over 200,000 gained the most flexibility, responsibility, and funding.

[2] The federal government offered transit funding for capital projects starting in the 1960s and extended funding to operations in the 1970s, but for the most part dealt directly with transit operators until ISTEA passed.

[3] The six central cities overrepresented in their MPOs are Salt Lake City, Tampa, St. Petersburg, Ft. Lauderdale, Washington D.C., and Middletown (Connecticut).

[4] The emissions budgets approach was added in the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments and allows regions to determine how much emissions reduction will be sought from each economic sector, i.e. industries, transportation. Regions that stay within their transportation emissions budgets still have to implement any transportation measures specifically included in the region's clean air plan (SIP) and evaluate significant air quality impacts, but need not take additional steps to reduce transportation emissions.

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