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FOSTERING SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION  
OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN TRAVEL POLICIES**

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**The U.S. Transportation Equity Act for the  
21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**An Innovative Framework for Transportation  
Planning and Decision-Making**

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## INTRODUCTION

Good morning. I am George Schoener, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, at the U.S. Department of Transportation. It is my pleasure to welcome our distinguished visitors from Europe and the European Council of Ministers of Transport and our U.S. colleagues from national, state, and local transportation organizations.

Our session sets the broad context for this workshop by examining how national frameworks can encourage progress toward sustainable urban travel. We will consider:

- How national frameworks encourage implementation of sustainable transportation without limiting local flexibility to respond to unique situations?
- And how do these frameworks encourage cooperation among national and local transportation authorities and between these authorities and those responsible for other sectors?

The U.S. endorses key conclusions and recommendations of the ECMT project. Achieving sustainable travel is an immense challenge facing all of our countries. We struggle to deal with the challenges of providing affordable and safe mobility and accessibility while ensuring that our communities are healthy and protected from environmental problems. The complex challenges of balancing traditional transportation goals with economic, environmental, and fairness goals is at the heart of sustainable transportation.

We share the conclusions of the ECMT-OECD project that national, state or provincial, regional, and local transportation agencies all must be involved in pursuit of a balance among policies and goals. Furthermore, transportation agencies often must work closely with organizations responsible for policy making and implementation for other sectors including economic development, environmental protection, public health, and land use planning.

The ECMT project offers a perceptive view of the challenge of coordination as having both a vertical dimension among national, state, and local transportation agencies, and a horizontal dimension, across sectors.

My presentation focuses on landmark national legislation that plays a major role in reshaping transportation planning and decision-making in the U.S. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21) provides an innovative policy framework to move U.S. cities and states toward integrated transportation planning and improves the quality of decisions on transportation investments and strategies. TEA-21 continues the planning framework initiated in 1991 under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Act.

In combination with the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAAA), TEA-21 ensures that air quality is a major consideration in planning future urban transportation. As Emil Frankel described, TEA-21 is proposed for renewal this year under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003, known as SAFETEA, which will continue the basic planning framework for another six years.

TEA-21 provides an innovative and integrated national approach of potential interest to other countries seeking to develop institutional frameworks to balance traditional transportation goals of congestion relief, mobility, and accessibility, with sustainability goals – economic development, environmental protection, and social equity. The U.S. approach and experiences may provide insights to other countries on how to accomplish national transportation policies through a combined “*top-down*” approach with a framework

for *continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive* planning, with “*bottom-up*” flexibility encouraging local leadership and adaptation to unique local situations.

## **OVERVIEW – THE U.S. CONTEXT**

In the U.S., transportation and environmental policy involve complex roles and responsibilities for the national, state, regional, and local governments. The Federal government provides major funding for highways and public transit. Although there is national funding for many transportation investments, states, regional, and local governments also provide their own resources.

A major TEA-21 principle is to encourage flexibility for state and local agencies to determine transportation investments and strategies. Along with encouragement of local decision-making processes, TEA-21 defines roles and responsibilities for local, regional, state public agencies and a transportation planning process that metropolitan areas are encouraged to employ. Local areas have a great deal of flexibility in tailoring that approach to local conditions, and in determining how federal transportation funds are invested.

Each urban area has flexibility in how it applies this planning framework to reflect its priorities and solve its problems.

### **The Transportation Equity Act of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21)**

Over the last twelve years, the Transportation Equity Act of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, known as TEA-21, and its landmark precursor, ISTEA, have had a strongly positive influence on transportation planning and decision-making across the country. TEA-21 is a comprehensive law, which includes national policy for all surface modes, research programs, funding for Intelligent Transportation Systems, pricing, and other demonstration projects, and multi-billion dollar annual funding programs for all surface transportation modes. I will focus on several key aspects of this comprehensive law – the policy framework and expectations for how states and urban areas should conduct transportation planning and decision-making.

The projected federal expenditures over the six years of TEA-21 are over \$200 billion for highways, public transit, and other surface transportation systems. This continues a federal expectation that state and local investment decisions will be based on a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process. This framework challenges states and urban areas to improve the balance between traditional transportation goals (congestion relief, mobility, accessibility, safety) and broader sustainability goals (economic development, environmental protection, and social equity).

Major aspects of the integrated TEA-21 planning framework follow.

**A. Modal planning evolves toward comprehensive intermodal planning.** In the U.S., states, cities, and transportation agencies have often conducted their own transportation planning. Planning often focused on problems from the perspective of each jurisdiction or modal authority.

A fundamental concern is how state, regional, and local public transit agencies can work together to take a regional perspective to solve problems such as growth, air pollution, or accessibility to jobs for low-income residents. Although some local areas and states created regional or metropolitan area governments and authorities, this was not always the case.

**B. Interagency collaboration, and cooperation.** Under TEA-21 metropolitan planning organizations or MPOs are encouraged to be the pivot points for meaningful inter-agency collaboration, cooperation, and technical analyses. MPOs are responsible for producing federally required documents --

specifically, long range transportation plans and three- to five-year programs of transportation investments. MPOs have important roles and responsibilities, but there remains a great deal of local flexibility. The emphasis in TEA-21 is on an effective process -- roles and responsibilities among state, regional, and local agencies can be defined as locally appropriate.

The key to success is not formal and rigidly defined institutional structures, but informal negotiation and compromise. The emphasis is on effective results demonstrated in the twenty-year plans and three-year investment programs, and ultimately, in improved decisions and system performance.

**C. Federal subsidies to specific modes are giving way to flexibility.** Because Congress funds such a major share of costs for local surface transportation, it designed the TEA-21 planning framework to assure that these funds are well spent. For example, TEA-21 emphasizes efficiency through maintenance and preservation of existing infrastructure as an alternative to building new facilities.

In 1991, ISTEA increased flexibility to move federal funds between modes. The intent was to encourage a regional problem solving view. The expectation was that the TEA-21 metropolitan planning process would provide a flexible mechanism for each metropolitan area to adopt to identify and solve regional transportation problems through applying resources to locally determined priorities.

**D. A crucial role for the Long Range Plan and Short Range Improvement Program.** As mentioned, each metropolitan area must now produce and regularly update a twenty year *long\_range transportation plan*. Each area must also produce a document that details the investments in transportation to be made in the region over a three-year period. The improvement or *investment program* should implement the strategic directions in the twenty-year plan. The plan and investment program are also where metropolitan areas demonstrate successful accomplishment of the integrated planning process and its specific aspects, as described by TEA-21.

The expectation is that long range plans will look twenty years to the future, identify economic and demographic trends, including land use projections, define transportation requirements, and perhaps offer a coherent regional "vision" for how to deal with those problems. At a minimum, the plans should provide realistic directions based on forecasts of costs and revenues. Ideally areas might progress further to challenge the region by showing costs and benefits of alternative scenarios.

In the U.S. each urban area must develop a short range (typically three year) program listing all transportation investments in the region -- detailing costs, source of revenues, construction schedule, and responsible organizations. This document should serve as a strategic management tool to implement the twenty-year plan. If that plan sets broad policy directions, the investment program provides projects and operational strategies to accomplish it.

As part of its long range planning process, the Washington, D.C. area MPO produced a vision plan laying out key goals and strategies to help the region develop the transportation system it needs to sustain economic development, environmental quality and a high quality of life. This system will be fiscally sustainable, promote areas of concentrated growth, manage demand and capacity, employ the best technology, and join all modes into a fully interconnected network.

**E. Broad public collaboration.** TEA-21 requires that the broad public be substantially involved throughout the planning process. The "public" can include the organizations of advocates with professional staff, but should also include individuals who are seldom involved in complex long range transportation planning. It must be "proactive," meaning that public involvement should occur throughout all stages of the process. MPOs and their planning partners should demonstrate their commitments to

public involvement by not only providing opportunities for involvement, but by actively bringing the public into the process.

Public involvement plays a vital role in the overall success of the broad TEA-21 planning process. This goes beyond the basic interest in open and democratic government. The involved and informed public may be more likely to support regional strategies developed through the planning process. The same can be said about broad involvement of public agencies and the private sector.

**F. Focus on air quality.** Under the Clean Air Act Amendments the federal government sets air quality standards for pollutants, including carbon monoxide, the components of ground level ozone, and fine particulates. The standards define levels above which there is significant damage to health and welfare. The more severe the classification of urban areas, the more progress is required and the longer the time allowed to meet the standards. State and local governments have flexibility to determine how to combine strategies to reduce emissions from transportation and stationary or primarily industrial sources.

The twenty-year plan and three-year investment program are the key products of the TEA-21 transportation planning process. Each urban area must demonstrate that it has adequate funding to cover investments in the plan and investment program. It is at this point that the TEA-21 planning process and Clean Air goals become integrated. The transportation system projected for the future must make the expected contribution to reducing air pollution. TEA-21 provides a framework for states and urban areas to use to address these difficult choices in bringing air quality goals into transportation planning.

**G. Focus on system performance and intermodal planning.** TEA-21 expects the regional planning process to move beyond concern with optimizing the performance of modes or systems within sub-regional jurisdictions, to also focus on overall system performance -- within the region and among modes functioning together. This approach focuses on travel requirements across the area, and on identifying the best combination of modal services and strategies to meet these requirements.

Planners use congestion and other management systems to focus elected officials and the public on the importance of performance measures, monitoring, and evaluation.

Planning factors – States and metropolitan areas are expected to consider within their planning processes seven broad topics, many of which relate closely to sustainability goals:

- Support economic vitality
- Increase safety and security
- Increase accessibility and mobility options for people and freight
- Protect the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve quality of life
- Enhance integration and connectivity of the transportation system
- Promote efficient system management and operation
- Emphasize preservation of the existing system

In the San Francisco Bay Area, the MPO and its planning partners are applying the TEA-21 concept of *intermodalism* and the flexible funding provisions to build major projects connecting BART, the regional metropolitan rail line, to the San Francisco, San Jose and Oakland airports, to a local light rail line, and to commuter and intercity Amtrak rail service. Flexible Federal TEA-21 funds will come both from public transit and flexible highway accounts.

**H. Financial realism – a critical consideration.** Financial realism is what makes the plan and investment program a reflection of critical choices because they merge what areas would like to do with what they realistically can do. Financial and transportation planning must be combined to evaluate long-term needs and strategies in terms of realistic costs and available resources. A project cannot appear on the three-year program unless a reliable source of revenues is demonstrated. The same is true for the twenty-year plan, although in the later years revenue probabilities rather than certainties are acceptable. Financial realism encourages a more strategic focus on problems, priorities, resources, and choices facing metropolitan areas.

The MPO in the LA region relies on financial realism to bring a focus on critical choices to political leaders, the public, and advocacy groups in an area exceeding 15 million persons and 38,000 square miles. This helps the planning process to contribute to decisions on how limited resources will be spent to solve complex transportation and environmental problems.

**I. Monitoring the process.** TEA-21 provides for federal reviews of the metropolitan planning processes. This involves an evaluation of consistency with TEA-21 expectations. Unlike the Clean Air Act, with targets and schedules, TEA-21 reviews are of a more abstract planning process. For example, what would constitute acceptable levels of public involvement or cooperative participation by transportation operators? The challenge is to encourage discussion among federal, state, and local agencies and progress without rigid requirements that neglect local diversity in problems, goals, and priorities.

#### **J. Lessons Learned and Insights for Other Countries**

Enactment of TEA-21 has produced a period of challenge and opportunity for planners and elected officials.

To conclude, the following are observations from over twelve years of experience developing, applying, and refining the integrated TEA-21 national planning framework. Hopefully these will be useful to other countries interested in developing national frameworks to improve the balance between transportation and sustainability goals.

- *Financial planning* and financial realism for the rigor and credibility lent to the planning process, particularly to the long-range plan and investment program.
- *Flexible funding*, to make it easier for local agencies to focus on the regional transportation planning process and direct investments accordingly.
- A fundamental role and focus of attention on a long range strategic plan and short range investment program.
- *An emphasis on the comprehensive regional planning process*, with clear expectations for the process itself, combined with local flexibility about how roles and responsibilities are distributed among state and local agencies. This may be particularly valuable if there are no institutional equivalents to the U.S. MPOs.
- *Assessments* of the results of local planning processes relative to expectations of the framework.
- *Opening the planning process* to substantive participation -- by public and private sector interests and the public.

Thank you for your interest. My staff and I look forward to learning about how other countries are developing integrated policy and planning frameworks and to an exchange on what is possible throughout this workshop.