

INTEGRATED REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION

CONSENSUS REPORT OF THE TWENTIETH NEW MEXICO FIRST TOWN HALL

**GALLUP, NEW MEXICO
OCTOBER 23-26, 1997**

INTRODUCTION

In opening remarks to the Twentieth Town Hall, John Horsley, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Government Affairs of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and nominee for Associate Deputy Secretary, stated that,

“Transportation is about shaping the future of New Mexico, and is the very sinew and bone of your state.”

New Mexico, with its geographically dispersed population, encompassing both large metropolitan as well as remote rural areas, is faced with special challenges when it comes to addressing transportation issues.

The challenge of addressing the transportation needs of New Mexico, both in the near term, as well as in the 21st century, was the subject of the Twentieth New Mexico First Town Hall held in Gallup, New Mexico, October 23-26, 1997. The Town Hall, sponsored by the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department (NMSHTD), the Associated Contractors of New Mexico, and the Nova Bus Company, brought together ninety-four New Mexicans from all parts of the state and three out-of-state guests to discuss the topic “Integrated Regional Transportation.” Participants identified and debated issues related to New Mexico’s transportation system and came to consensus on recommendations that will have a long term impact on the future of our state. This report reflects the consensus of the participants on the issues discussed at the Town Hall.

THE CURRENT STATE OF TRANSPORTATION IN NEW MEXICO

As we enter the 21st century, transportation has become central to much of the activity in our country. It is the backbone of our economy and the foundation of economic development. The need for various transportation systems and their impact on quality of life and economic development are different in rural and urban areas. This creates a particularly difficult public policy challenge for New Mexico.

The participants believe that the current transportation system in New Mexico impacts the quality of life in urban areas and contributes to restricting the ability of rural and tribal areas to develop their economies and access modern facilities, although it was recognized that lifestyle choices vary. There was consensus that often quality of life and economic development are at odds when the issue of transportation system enhancements is being discussed. Some Town Hall participants felt that the present system has evolved

not through planning, but through the imposition of special interests that has resulted in restricted choices for New Mexico citizens.

Our dependency on the automobile and highway system was acknowledged as having the single greatest impact with respect to lifestyle and quality of life issues. Concern was expressed over the decline in our highway infrastructure, citing New Mexico's current ability to address only 12% of our highway needs while other states address 40-45%¹. Safety was specifically identified as an important issue in these discussions.

Reflecting the dramatic technological developments of the telecommunications industry, the Town Hall also suggested that this area be included in future discussions under a broader definition of "transportation." The ability of individuals to telecommute, the development of distance learning centers, and the expansion of related business opportunities may all be methods of "moving knowledge" to allow economic expansion while maintaining quality of life.

Acknowledging that vehicular traffic on our highways is the component of our transportation system that has the most impact, participants identified strengths and weaknesses of the major transportation infrastructures in New Mexico, roads and highways, rail, and air. These are summarized in Table 1.

¹ Page 49, Background report

TABLE 1 - STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF NEW MEXICO TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

| <u>Transportation Infrastructures</u> | <u>Strengths</u> | <u>Weaknesses</u> |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Roads and Highways | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • convenience • developed infrastructure • mobility • attention paid to safety • network of federal, state, county and municipal roads • economic impact • three major interstate routes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insufficient to handle peak loads (urban) • no incentives for HOV • air quality problems • lack of mass transit systems • limitations in rural areas • inadequate level of maintenance • insufficient multi-lane highways • safety issues with shoulders and sub-grade failures • insufficient number of and inadequate rest area facilities • NM used as a “bridge state”² • inadequate prioritization of funding • inadequate funding derived from commercial traffic • lack of consistent road beautification • high personal and social costs • system is too expensive to maintain • insufficient police and traffic enforcement • insufficient enforcement and regulation of commercial trucks • inadequate bridge replacement program • lack of mobility and accessibility for those who do not or cannot own or operate a private vehicle |
| Rail | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • takes traffic off the highways • moves large volume of goods point to point • able to move large number of people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Mexico used primarily as a “bridge state” • little intrastate passenger service • grade crossings • no international railroad crossing • less flexible in point to point than trucks, slower than air • schedule dependent • generally not part of planning process (privately owned) |
| Air | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fast • safe • takes traffic off the highways | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of development outside of Albuquerque • high regional fares • restrictions due to altitude of many New Mexico cities • lack of competition • insufficient direct routes • Aircraft noise and land use compatibility issues • inadequate space for parking, pickup and drop off at Albuquerque airport • inconvenient times at regional airports • insufficient intermodal connections at airports to other transportation modes |

² “Bridge State” is a term defined as: A state which is used as a bridge to provide goods and services to other states and whose infrastructure is negatively impacted.

The Town Hall also differentiated between urban, rural and tribal transportation strengths and weaknesses. These are identified in Table 2.

TABLE 2 - STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES BY GEOGRAPHIC REGION

| <u>Geographic Region</u> | <u>Strengths</u> | <u>Weaknesses</u> |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Urban | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • infrastructure highly developed • greater political influence • greater source of revenue for local investment • air service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • air quality, congestion • lack of regional planning across organizational entities • citizen perception of mass transit • federal regulations |
| Rural | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less congestion, better air quality, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • difficulty competing with urban areas for scarce resources • lack of infrastructure negatively affects economic development • federal environmental regulations limit infrastructure development • poor air service • limited access to basic services |
| Tribal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased funding from ISTEA • when tribes are involved in regional planning (RPOs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need exists for bridges • inadequate bridge rehabilitation and replacement program • maintenance funds are limited • when tribes are not involved in regional planning (RPOs) • anti-new road building sentiments by right of way regulators • lack of “scale-jumping” enforcement |

TRENDS THAT IMPACT FUTURE TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

The Town Hall identified a number of trends that will impact the future of transportation needs in several topical areas:

Population Trends

- Growing population of State
- Dual-income households
- Net inward migration to state
- Changing education trends (lottery)
- Mexican border population growth
- Aging population in the state
- Higher rate of growth in metropolitan areas
- Second home in rural areas
- People moving to jobs

Environmental Trends

- Air quality standards
- Availability of water
- Increased crime in urban areas
- Changing government regulations
- Move toward large cars

Economic Development/Technology Trends

- Growth of telecommunications
- 4-lane needs of industry
- NAFTA
- Alternate fuel vehicle development
- Roadway life extension
- Welfare to work
- Increased tourism
- Global market/competition
- Increased intermodal needs
- Intelligent transportation system developments
- Increased demand for timely delivery of goods

Infrastructure Trends

- Aging infrastructure
- Increased movement of hazardous material
- WIPP
- Innovative financing
- Growth of aviation industry
- Maintenance of infrastructure
- Bigger/heavier truck loads
- Cost of construction increasing faster than anticipated

Land Use Trends

- Trend toward in-fill and growth management
- Increased interest in mixed use development

Attitude Trends

- Increased anti-growth/anti-sprawl sentiment
- Clean City projects
- Movement of Federal to State control
- Move toward privatization
- Regionalization of government services
- Greater use of personal vehicles
- Higher fuel costs due to global needs
- Increased competition for financial resources
- Alternate transportation options - bicycles, pedestrian
- Energy Conservation
- Impact of traffic transiting New Mexico
- More emphasis on leisure time
- New partnerships with Indian nations
- VMT (vehicle miles traveled) increasing faster than population

The trends identified above must be factored into the development of a realistic model.

WHO MANAGES AND PAYS FOR TRANSPORTATION?

The Town Hall participants agreed that the complexity of the transportation system with respect to jurisdictional, regulatory, planning, decision-making, and funding

authorities demands streamlining, improved coordination and strategic planning, regional cooperation, and an “intermodal perspective.” A preliminary matrix of jurisdictional authority, planning, decision-making and funding was developed which demonstrates the complexity identified by the various panels. This is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3 - A PRELIMINARY MATRIX OF AUTHORITIES

| | <u>Autos</u> | <u>Trucks</u> | <u>Non-Rail Transit</u> | <u>Air</u> | <u>Rail</u> | <u>Peds, Bikes, other</u> |
|------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Federal | L/P/F | L/P/F | F/L | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F |
| Tribal | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F |
| State | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F |
| Regional | P | P | P | - | P | P |
| County | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F |
| Municipal | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F | L/P/F |
| School Dist | L/P | - | L/P | - | - | P |

LEGEND

L = legal; regulatory authority
P = planning; decision-making
F = Funding (defined as the entity that is the source of funding, not just disposition)
note: all modes include infrastructure

**IMPEDIMENTS TO AN INTEGRATED REGIONAL
TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM**

The Town Hall strongly believes that there is inadequate planning for the life cycle cost of the transportation infrastructure. This is true not only on a project by project basis but on a system basis as well. Private industry has implemented such analysis more effectively than the public sector. The Town Hall urges that professionals in both areas educate the public and elected officials on the need for this initiative.

Impediments to creating an integrated regional transportation system were identified:

- There is more than one type of region in New Mexico
- The number and relationships between jurisdictional and political layers in the process impede effective planning
- The state and MPO long range plans have been incompatible because state planning is policy based and MPO planning is project based
- Inadequate coordination between the state and tribes
- There are insufficient resources to meet the needs
- There is insufficient coordination among the various components of the transportation system to create an effective intermodal system
- While local input on transportation is important, pushing decision-making down to the local level makes integration more difficult
- Transportation/infrastructure priorities are frequently changed politically

- The linkage between airports and other modes of transportation is not adequately planned in Albuquerque and elsewhere
- Adequate competition does not exist for some modes of transportation
- Poor public understanding of transportation decision making processes limits constructive participation

RECOMMENDATIONS

It was the consensus of the Town Hall that funding of the transportation infrastructure is inadequate, that an integrated regional transportation system does not exist, and that planning for such a system needs to be better integrated. Recommendations were split into two sections for ease of understanding, “Funding” and “Developing an Integrated Regional Transportation System”:

FUNDING

ENHANCED FUNDING:

- Funds generated for transportation should be dedicated for transportation. This should be established by Constitutional amendment
- Establish toll roads where appropriate
- Increase the licensing fees for motor vehicles
- Allow for regional authorities to tax
- Increase user fees
- Increase registration fees
- The state tax on gasoline should be fully dedicated to transportation and increased if needed
- Encourage the pooling of funds across jurisdictional lines
- Users and beneficiaries of enhanced infrastructure should pay for that infrastructure
- Close all fuel tax loopholes
- Eliminate \$50,000 cap on spending for public transit

REALLOCATION OF FUNDING:

- The motor vehicle excise tax should be redirected from the General Fund to transportation
- Place higher priority on pavement maintenance and preservation as opposed to major corridor improvements or expansion

DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS:

- Funding allocated by the legislature should be tied to long range planning
- The funding formula for school buses should be more expeditiously addressed to help solve the needs of all school districts

DEVELOPING AN INTEGRATED REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

POLICY

- Planning and implementation needs to be more strategic (long range), and state-wide
- Clearly define the demarcation of authority and responsibility between state and local governments
- Integrate the planning activities of the various components of the transportation system
- Expand regional airports and increase number of flights
- Strengthen private sector involvement
- Realign some state highway districts and RPOs to be consistent with each other and to reflect common functional/demographic characteristics
- Idle time for school buses should be evaluated for other public uses
- SHTD continue to improve its efficiency in delivering road projects to maximize available funding
- Promote integration of advanced technologies to increase efficiency
- Utilize market analysis and cost/benefit analysis for transportation decisions

PROCEDURAL

- Utilize the Western Governor's Association and National Governor's Association to exert influence on federal policy, laws and regulations
- Existing resources should be used more efficiently
- Develop and encourage incentives for ride sharing
- Strengthen RPO planning and implementation process to achieve integrated plans
- Strengthen private sector involvement
- Include all private, regional, local and tribal projects in State Transportation Improvement Plan as information
- Enhance the efficiency of freight movement
- Collaborations with the private sector for the coordinated use of hotel and airport vans should be developed
- SHTD continue to improve its efficiency in delivering road projects to maximize available funding
- Develop broad network of proponents/advocates who promote understanding of transportation issues and options state wide through federal, tribal, state and local government and Legislative forums
- Review and enforce the weight limits imposed on interstate trucks
- Seek increased citizen and local input to the transportation planning and prioritization process
- Study school bus routes on unimproved roads for safety issues

LEGISLATIVE

- The Regional Transit Authority Bill should be passed by the legislature

- Institutional reform as well as realignment of Functional Transportation Districts are needed and should include the SHTD, Economic Development District, enforcement, public regulators, commission, motor transportation, and regional planning to be consistent with each other and reflect common functional and demographic characteristics
- Expand public transit systems, particularly for school transportation and between rural/urban areas
- Develop an urban transit system in Albuquerque
- Integrate land use and transportation planning
- The Highway Commission should be changed to Transportation Commission by Constitutional amendment

CONCLUSION

The participants of the Twentieth Town Hall on Integrated Regional Transportation identified strengths and weaknesses of New Mexico's transportation system, and discussed issues that will affect the future success or failure of our state to compete in the 21st century, while maintaining the quality of life and lifestyle choices that distinguish New Mexico from other states. The importance of the recommendations provided in this report cannot be overstated. The need exists for all of the policy makers and organizational entities with influence over the transportation system in New Mexico to begin to work closely together to streamline and integrate the complex transportation system.