

# MINNESOTA Journal

A PUBLIC POLICY MONTHLY FROM THE CITIZENS LEAGUE

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## Saving public education by creating space for innovation

by Joe Graba

New York City has put its 800-page building code on the web for free access. Previously it was \$45. It has been a frequently requested item at the city website. Application forms are available online for building permits but applications must still be submitted in person. A number of communities in Silicon Valley have gone one better with online submission of applications and permits.—*New York Times*, April 22, 2001

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Somewhere in the last quarter of the century, knowledge became the key strategic resource in our society, in the way that land was when we were an agricultural society, and that natural resources and manufacturing capability were when we were an industrial society.

Without many of us in education paying attention, our business leaders began to understand that the future of their organizations was directly tied to the knowledge base of their employees, and they began to express concerns about the knowledge development or knowledge transfer system in our country. Political leaders and business leaders began to escalate the expectations for our educational system. Those expectations generated pressure on the existing system to improve its ability to develop knowledge in our young people.

Over the last 20 years or so our education system has improved. I'm not one who thinks it has deteriorated. But the expectations and the importance of knowledge have escalated faster than the system has been able to respond. The reality is that the gap has probably widened from what it was 20 or 25 years ago.

I often think that while almost everyone in this country wants our schools to be better, almost nobody wants them to be different. I really don't believe we can have the kind of schools we need in the 21st century if we aren't willing to make them significantly different from the schools that we had in the 20th century. But I don't believe we can get the kind of schools we need by changing the ones we have.

We have known for some time that public education has a problem with replication of innovation. We operated a Council on Quality Education in Minnesota during the 1970s

which funded many creative innovations in our schools, but we had very little success in replicating these innovations. Many, if not most, of the innovations could not be sustained in the district where they were started once the grant funds ran out. This same pattern has been observed across the country with other efforts to stimulate innovation in public education.

Recent research on the processes of change in the private sector provides the best explanation for this inability to spread or even sustain innovation in education. Clayton Christensen at the Harvard Business School recently published some research on the inability of private companies to change themselves. He says that most organizations have the ability to improve themselves incrementally through what he calls "sustaining innovations." But there is another kind of innovation, which he calls "disruptive innovation," that requires fundamental changes in the core business plan, the core products, the core services, the core functions of the company. Christensen says that almost no company is able to make those kinds of changes. Almost all of the fundamental changes in an industry sector are the result of the creation of new organizations.

For years I thought that the resistance to change in organizations was the result of an inability to envision a radically different approach to doing business. But Christensen says that it is deeper than that, that the problem is more fundamental.

There is a more recent book out, by Richard Foster, which reinforces Christensen's findings. Both Christensen and Foster say that within every organization a culture gets created of processes and assumptions and habits and atti-



Minnesota editorial writers continue their assault against contrary views

### Biodiesel makes good sense in the long run.

According to the **Star Tribune** (4/15/01), "the first diesel engine, built in the 1890's ran on peanut oil." "Today it's quite possible to replace a substantial portion of petroleum diesel with fuels made from vegetable oils or animal fats, at a reasonably competitive price." "With minor engine adjustments and a major investment in fuel processing plants, biodiesel could soon replace half or more of petrodiesel. Bold steps taken now could move the nation a long way toward energy self-sufficiency, while clearing urban air and lowering U. S. contributions to global warming."

The **Mankato Free Press** (4/3/01) favors small steps to energy self-sufficiency. "Biodiesel and ethanol won't soon replace foreign oil, but giving the alternative energy industry a start is a big step in that direction." "Minnesota was a leader in requiring the use of ethanol... leadership that paid off with a stronger ethanol industry and increased use of ethanol all across the country." "Biodiesel will initially add a couple of cents to a gallon of fuel... (but) petroleum based diesel has already gone up as much as 50 cents a gallon this past year." Biodiesel "makes good sense for consumers, the environment, the economy and farmers."

### And the stadium issue lives on...

As the **Star Tribune** (4/13/01) noted, "...hostility toward a new ballpark has receded, replaced by a cooler, more pragmatic view that the Twins (and Vikings) are important assets that should be retained if some reasonable solution can be found... The bill for a new Twins stadium offered this session was a reasonable solution that didn't get a fair airing."

The **Red Wing Republican** (4/17) feels that legislators are playing politics with the issue, rather than doing what is right for this state, noting "that 18 franchises in other states have built or renovated ballparks in the last decade, 17 with public money. Among those, the average

private contribution was 37%."

"While the majority of Minnesotans want to keep major league baseball in Minnesota, there is a real possibility it could leave" asserts the **Princeton Union-Eagle** (4/26/01). "Public sentiment in favor of the stadium appears to be gaining but legislators, some of whom ran for office on the anti-stadium platform, are afraid to vote for it. It's come down to the political considerations on a bill that many fear would pass once the public understands it."

"We've long held that taxpayers shouldn't be called upon to foot the bill for new sports stadiums, and we still believe that" the **Rochester Post Bulletin** (5/1/01) wrote. "But the latest Twins stadium proposal which involves a no-interest state loan to the Twins brings Pohlman closer to footing the brunt of the load for a new ballpark... lawmakers (must) get some indication that the people of Minnesota are interested in keeping the team. And that means voting with their fannies, lodged in the blue plastic seats of the Metrodome."

However, the **Fergus Falls Journal** (4/4/01) still feels "Minnesota residents do not want to use public dollars to help either team (Twins or Vikings) build a stadium. No ifs, ands or buts." Furthermore, "The idea of a low-interest loan may seem more palatable than a simple handout, but lost interest by the state is really no different than a subsidy."

### Education funding should be priority...

...was a sentiment echoed around the state. The **St. Cloud Times** (4/20/01) feels that "lost amid the legislative battle over how to fund K-12 education is the importance of the state paying for all-day kindergarten classes." "Research studies and anecdotal evidence clearly indicate all-day kindergarten improves academic and social skills of children, especially in their primary years."

From the **Brainerd Daily Dispatch** (4/16/01), "Lawmakers need to focus in on education issues." "How much money is

enough? How much is too little? Every school districts situation is different." However, "Minnesotans want good schools. There's little doubt about that. The legislature must focus on this issue and come up with an equitable dollar amount for education."

"Attracting and keeping good teachers has become difficult enough without the added pressure of a shrinking budget," notes the **South Washington Co. Bulletin** (4/4/01). "Ventura's budget proposal is a start down a slippery slope." "The proposals he has set forth will force young teachers out of the profession. They are the ones without seniority. New teachers are the ones who lose their job when layoffs are necessary."

According to the **Fergus Falls Journal** (4/27/01) "While far from perfect, the House and Senate plans are both vast improvements on Governor Ventura's backwards ideas on education." "No government priority has been more poorly served during the past four years than public education in Minnesota." "K-12 education has suffered through relatively lean years. Perhaps only higher education has fared worse. Meanwhile, national rankings continue to place Minnesota's schools lower and lower on the quality scale."

### Marijuana use for medical purposes under discussion.

The **Rochester Post Bulletin** (4/11) reported on a public forum conducted by the state departments of Health and Public Safety. "Both departments said the forum was not intended as an endorsement of marijuana use for anything except medical purposes." Minnesota has a law, passed in 1980, which authorizes such medical research. "Critics of such laws believe they are intended as a first step toward legalizing marijuana for recreational use... understandable but misplaced." They continued, "Physicians prescribe morphine and other potent drugs; it would not be unreasonable to let them prescribe marijuana to help sick people." **MJ**

### Learnstat: 911 for School Completion?

by Lyle Wray

As the spring shoots poke through, the latest Citizens League study committee is nearing completion of its work on how to dramatically increase the rate of school completion of students in our two core city school districts. The grim facts are that if you filled an auditorium with ninth graders from Minneapolis and St. Paul, only about half of them would successfully complete their work and graduate in four years. Against this backdrop, the committee has struggled mightily with a complex set of challenges.

Across the country, New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani is pushing a new initiative - Learnstat - to increase the performance of their 1,200 public schools. Learnstat is patterned on the widely replicated crime reduction strategy, Compstat (an abbreviation for computer statistics). Police precincts were expected to come up with strategies for decreasing crime statistics in their areas by using good information to set goals for crime reduction and to use their resources to support those goals.

How might the learning from Compstat be applied to the challenge of dramatically increasing school completion in our core districts? As with school completion or

crime, any public program gets a good start if it has clear goals at the outset. The core logic of Compstat has four basic pillars: accurate, timely information and intelligence, rapid deployment of resources in a strategic fashion, effective tactics at the direct face-to-face level, and relentless follow-up and assessment to learn from, and improve on, experience.

**Accurate, Timely Information.** The first step is to get good, up-to-date information. Just who are the children and youth dropping out? How many come from single parent families? How many come from families where English is a second language? How many have recently moved to the Twin Cities? There is a wealth of information in databases at the state Department of Children, Families and Learning. Getting that information to the schools and teachers to use might be another thing, especially since many teachers do not have a telephone, never mind a computer.

**Rapid Deployment of Resources in a Strategic Fashion.** Acting on what works is a core element of the approach. If we are dealing largely with children who are poor and from a single parent family, what are the most effective strategies for school success for many or all of these children? What is the best use of limited resources to achieve the outcomes? For example, if there are programs that can produce very high levels of reading at grade level by the end of the third grade - often seen as a powerful predictor of later school success - are those programs fully deployed for all children who need them?

**Effective Tactics at the Face-to-Face Level.** Highly capable teachers are especially important for improving learning for students at risk of dropping out. Are the skills for teaching students at risk present in all teachers serving these students?

**Relentless Follow Up and Assessment and Learning from Experience.** After looking at information, if things are not working, what adjustments in tactics and use of resources

are best made to produce better results? It is this analyzing and acting on timely information and learning from it that distinguishes the Compstat approach. If a given approach is not working, there is a limited amount of time before trying something with a greater chance of success.

Clearly, an approach such as Learnstat is no panacea and does not displace all of the long public school reform agenda. Crucial elements such as school choice, post secondary options, and expansion of the charter school movement are no doubt critical to progress. Yet there is much to be learned here. The general logic of Compstat may be destined to application in an even wider context. The new Mayor of Baltimore, Martin O'Malley, has created what he calls "Citistat" for the whole city that is used for every city agency. At meetings every two weeks in a computer filled room, city agency heads meet with the mayor to analyze trends in public services. Off the shelf software was said to limit the start up costs to \$20,000 (for further information, see [www.ci.baltimore.md.us/news/citistat/gbacitistat.html](http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/news/citistat/gbacitistat.html)).

For schools where about half of the ninth graders finish successfully four years later, using data to zero-in on school completion issues and to get principals and parents to commit to improvements is no small achievement. As the Mayor of New York City fleshes out his proposal to the Board of Education, we should watch closely and see what would make sense for us to apply here. Just as Minneapolis applied a variation of Compstat here to reduce crime, our core districts might wish to commit to Learnstat to dramatically increase the chances of our high school students succeeding. **MJ**

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### The Minnesota Journal

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tudes and values. Those features, which Foster calls the "invisible architecture" of the company, are pervasive and almost impossible to change.

Christensen also points out that the radically different innovations are almost always lower in quality, in their early stages, than the traditional products or services. There's almost never a major market niche for them. Mainline customers want to stay with what they know.

**"We need to be careful that we don't love the system more than we love the kids it was designed to serve."**

Most of us were a mainline customer of our school districts. In other words, most of us benefited from the current system and were relatively comfortable in it, making us resistant to a radical departure for our children or grandchildren.

So put yourself in the position of the chief executive of a company or of the superintendent of a school district, and try to sell your customers on a radically different approach that bucks the internal culture of the organization, lowers quality, and is not much wanted by the customers.

The resistance to change is inherent in organizations. It is *not* just in schools. Many people have said resistance to change comes from the unions, or the administration, the legislature, or the state bureaucracy. The reality is that the same inability to change is found in the private sector where we don't have all of these political elements.

I think education is at the point where radical innovations are beginning to appear, but I am bothered that we in public education are not creating them. I have become attracted to the charter sector in Minnesota as a way for us to do

that. I am trying to convince superintendents, school board members and union leaders that we need to create these radically different schools ourselves or we are going to see the decline of public education in our country. But most superintendents don't see creating new schools as their role. Most Board members don't see this as their role. Neither, of course, do our union leaders.

Forty years ago, in the late 1950s, a new kind of retailing began to emerge in America. Discount retailers were beginning to replace department stores as the main player. Christensen notes that Dayton-Hudson was the only department store company that was successful in creating a discount retail chain. They realized discount retailing was going to happen, whether they liked it or not, so they decided to create Target Stores. They made it a wholly owned subsidiary that reported directly to the corporate board. We all know what happened: today we

have a successful department store and discount store company now known as Target Corporation.

Dayton-Hudson didn't eliminate their department stores. They created a new entity with a new set of values, with new processes, and a new business model. They gave it autonomy and set it alongside their department stores and let the public decide which they wanted. Imagine if they had tried to change those department stores. They would have lost thousands and thousands of customers. They might have gone out of business.

In December of last year, Montgomery Ward filed for bankruptcy, in January Sears announced the closure of 50 stores, J.C. Penney announced the closure of 40 stores. None of those companies could bring themselves to create a competitor to their mainline operation. They were determined to use the same business model in the last half of the century as they did in the first.

When Dayton-Hudson first created Target, most of us didn't think much of it. Most of us didn't want to admit that we shopped there. It was a small market that needed time to develop. But through

the years, Target improved and became legitimate and it and other discount retailers have been steadily picking up market share from the department stores. In this case the parent corporation, Dayton-Hudson, kept the new customers of the new discount stores.

I think that is where we are with public education. We are trying to hold on to the pattern of the past and change the existing system only incrementally. My fear for public education is that somebody else is going to create the new schools.

I believe that we need radically different schools. I say this as someone who has spent his whole life in public education in one part of it or another. At the close of my career, I have arrived at the conclusion that the system needs to be radically changed and that the best way to do that is to create new entities. This is really difficult, because most of us are terribly loyal to the systems we've spent our careers in.

All of our organizations and assumptions are created around it. We are attached to the athletics, the extracurricular and the social aspects of it.

I did not get here easily, and I do not expect that anyone else will either. This was an agonizing journey for me after 40 years in the current system. But we know that the system that we've got is not serving a significant proportion of our students. We're turning out tens of thousands of students, or they are dropping out, every year whose lives are negatively impacted by the inability of our system to help them acquire the knowledge they need to be successful participants in our society.

We need to be careful that we don't love the system more than we love the kids it was designed to serve. That requires that some of us have the courage to make that migration over to creating new entities. I believe that we should not try to make this change as a frontal attack, but instead we should create the options alongside the current system and, over time, let the people decide which of the options ought to thrive.

There is a charter school in Henderson, Minnesota, with about 100

students in grades 7-12, that has no classes and it has no courses. Now that's a fundamental change in the operation of a school. I taught science for 15 years, and I don't think I ever would have created that school.

The other aspect of this school that is really fundamentally different is that there are no employees. The teachers have formed a cooperative, which negotiates with the board of the school for a lump sum payment every year and the expectations for student outcomes for that sum. Then the teachers' cooperative goes off and runs the school. They set the budget, hire their colleagues, evaluate their colleagues, and terminate their colleagues. They set the salaries, determine how much they're going to spend on technology, and so forth. They don't have a superintendent. They don't have a principal, a counselor, or a janitor. The teachers do these things themselves.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has contributed \$4.3 million to replicate this school. Incidentally, before the Gates Foundation donated this money, six other charter schools had contracted with this cooperative to provide services to their schools. So I use this as an example of the kind of fundamental changes that I'm talking about, occurring through the creation of new entities.

Most of us are not very comfortable with that kind of approach. That is the advantage of having a system that lets people, other than old teachers or politicians, create new schools, people who think differently and who aren't captured by the old assumptions and values.

Public education was a major reason this country reached the level of significance that it did in the 20th century. I am worried about whether public education will sustain itself through the 21st century. I am afraid we have locked in on the idea that public education can only occur in the kind of schools we used in the last century. If we can't break away from that institution, then this society, given the pres-

ures of change, is going to go around public education.

Paul Houston, head of the American Association of School Administrators, says that we need to be careful that we don't confuse the

faith with the church. The church is the form, the institution, not the faith.

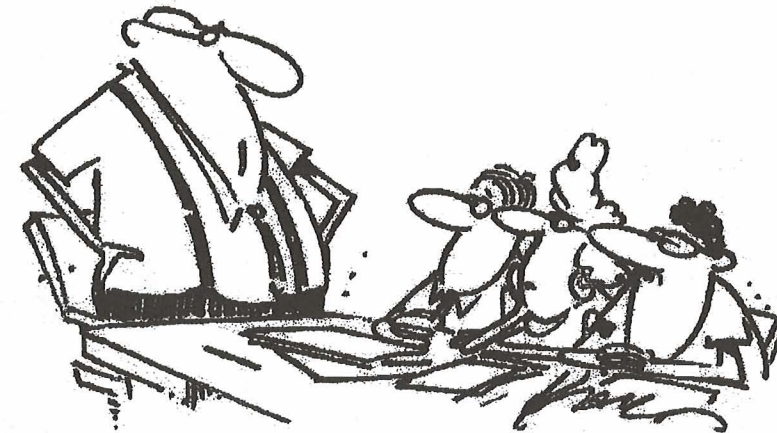
The task of redesigning our public education system so it better meets the changing needs of this new

century is both daunting and exciting. It is also one of the most significant opportunities facing our democracy. These next few years provide a special opportunity for two reasons. Many educational leaders are coming to understand that we have

**"I am afraid we have locked in on the idea that public education can only occur in the kind of schools we used in the last century."**

made many of our schools too large. Plans are being developed to create smaller leaning environments. This provides an excellent opportunity to create the kind of innovative space that will allow some of these new creations to be significantly different from our traditional approach.

The other reasons that this is the right time to try these "radically" different approaches has to do with the turnover of teachers we expect to experience in the near term. It is difficult for all of us to



**"....Being the intelligent public educators that we are, why don't we just admit our mistakes of the past, come up with some great, innovative, brilliant, cutting edge idea?...Like copying that school in Henderson."**

shed our old values, habits and attitudes as we approach the closing years of our careers. The projected turnover of teachers should provide us with younger teachers that will find it easier to be enthusiastic about significantly different approaches to both governance and learning programs.

If we are willing to stimulate the creation of new entities that develop new approaches to learning we can have a public education system that serves us as well in this new century as it did in the last century. We need to have the courage to be excited about the opportunity to participate in this stimulating challenge. **MJ**

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# Bus rapid transit becoming a preferred mode of public transportation

by Craig A. Amundsen

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is increasingly being recognized as a preferred mode of public transportation. BRT offers a "third way" between traditional bus and light rail solutions. Electronically-guided, rubber-tired vehicles can operate on exclusive transitways with the same quality of ride, safety, and reliability as rail-guided vehicles.

The ingredients of a successful BRT system include:

▲ **Modern, rail-like vehicles.** The vehicles must offer an attractive exterior and modern interior styling with large windows.

▲ **Exclusive rights-of-way.** Signal priority helps, but it is usually not sufficient to achieve the speeds needed to attract riders. The exclusive rights-of-way can be underground, elevated, or grade-separated.

▲ **Attractive infrastructure.** To a large extent, the aesthetic quality of the surrounding area, such as landscaping, public art, and uniquely designed stations are what distinguishes BRT from traditional busways.

▲ **Streamlined fare collection.** Fare collection can be via free-fare zones or self-serve media at stations or even onboard vehicles, but pay-as-you-go fare collection inhibits the rapid throughput needed for BRT to compete with other forms of transportation.

▲ **Strong "brand identity."** BRT must be marketed as the fixed guideway line that it is to gain acceptance as an attractive option and create economic investment in a manner that currently attracts real estate developers to rail systems.

▲ **Fast dwell times.** Guidance technologies, in addition to all of the previous characteristics, may be employed to achieve faster docking so that BRT can be considered competitive with light-rail transit. Level boarding is essential, whether accomplished with low-floor vehicles or high platforms.

## Guidelines to be followed

Successful BRT systems in operation in Brazil, Canada, and Europe as well as in the United States, can serve as models for the future. The first lesson to be learned is

that high-quality, high-performance rapid transit systems, capable of generating significant transportation and development benefits, can be implemented with any vehicle/guideway technology, but special efforts must often be made to get the appropriate features in a single package.

This comprehensive systems approach usually comes with rail, and there are numerous examples of light rail systems that failed because they lacked one or more of the significant attributes. A total systems approach is much harder, technically, institutionally, and politically, to put and keep together with the bus mode. It can be accomplished, however, with good planning, an informed community, and progressive decision makers who want to maximize the payoff from available transit resources.

**The public often perceives anything associated with buses as being cheap rather than inexpensive, a second-rate choice to be used only when none other is feasible.**

The second lesson learned from previous experience is that, because high-quality, high-performance BRT can be provided in a number of ways, there needs to be a rigorous planning process that weighs all the cost and benefit criteria prior to making a decision on investing in rapid transit. There are critical linkages between rapid transit and the rest of the transportation

system and between rapid transit and the full range of quality-of-life issues affecting a community, such as land use and the environment. Rapid transit planning must be holistic, regardless of mode, and involve



Streamlined fare collection in Curitiba, Brazil

all stakeholders – local and state officials, the private sector, and the public.

Yet another lesson is that although BRT needs to have a comprehensive set of features consistent with its specific implementation environment, it can be constructed in logical increments. The systems

can be built in successive phases, adding scope and features such as additional stations, grade separation, and communication systems when conditions warrant. The objective is to end up with a system containing a complete package of performance and quality characteristics consistent with its market and the physical environment in which it operates.

## Greater Cleveland BRT

One of the most sophisticated Bus Rapid Transit systems in the United States is being designed for Cleveland, Ohio. Designated the

Euclid Corridor Transportation project, the BRT will feature an exclusive center median busway connecting the region's largest employment center (the central business district) with the University Circle area, the second largest employment center, which is also the area's major cultural, medical, and educational district.

The BRT is part of a broad redevelopment

program for the Euclid Avenue corridor, one of Cleveland's oldest areas. It includes a building-to-building reconstruction of Euclid Avenue, with enhanced pedestrian zones, significant sidewalk and center median landscaping, new street and sidewalk lighting, new center median platform stations with distinctive shelter architecture, and exclusive bus and auto lanes.

The downtown transit zone will increase the flow of bus service during peak periods and allow better distribution of bus riders to work destinations within the central business district.

A new intermodal transfer facility at Public Square will integrate bus service and other suburban bus routes with the rapid transit line which connects to the central business district and, from there, to the airport. A significant percentage of the expected new ridership in the corridor will come from the bus/rail transfers at this facility.

The system will consist of an exclusive center median busway on Euclid Avenue and median lanes and center platform stations along most of the length of Euclid Avenue. The fleet of vehicles will include 24 hybrid-electric buses with six spares. The electric trolley buses will be low-floor, 60-foot-long articulated, rubber-tired vehicles with both left- and right-side doors to



Exclusive right-of-way and streetscape improvements for Euclid Corridor in Cleveland, Ohio

facilitate boarding from both the center median platform stations and curbside stations in the University Circle area. Fare collection will take place onboard the

transit vehicles.

A new radio communications system will incorporate reliable, wide-area coverage, automatic vehicle location (AVL), and emergency alerting. In addition to onboard emergency alerting, the AVL system will include a traffic signal/bus priority system, passenger onboard schedule information, bus stop passenger information displays, and a passenger transfer management system.

New traffic control striping will be installed to conform to the busway design, and a new traffic signal system will be installed to give priority to buses operating on Euclid Avenue. A reconstructed street will conform to the new busway alignment with landscaped median, bus-stop platforms, a rumble strip to separate the bus and auto lanes and an upgraded sidewalk.

Construction of the Cleveland BRT is expected to start in 2003, with completion scheduled for 2005-2006. Once in operation, travel time and quality of service will be improved by the use of hybrid-electric buses in an exclusive busway with signal priority and the connection provided by the new intermodal transfer facility. Also, the transit-restricting nature of the existing downtown street network will be eliminated with the introduction of the downtown transit zone, and congestion in the central business district will be reduced.

## Impediments to Implementation

Despite its advantages as a lower cost solution to upgrading existing service, changing the image of bus transit to one

that lures people out of their cars, the way light-rail transit has over the past 20 years, has not been easy. The public often perceives anything associated with buses as being cheap rather than inexpensive, a sec-

**"Many planners do not know the capabilities of BRT and incorrectly attribute the high performance and customer acceptance of rail rapid transit to uniquely rail characteristics, such as tracks, rather than to the exclusive guideway, stations, and service quality that are also offered by bus rapid transit."**

ond-rate choice to be used only when none other is feasible. As a result, municipal officials may discourage consideration of bus options for fear of losing public support for a rail transit investment.

From a technical perspective, many planners do not know the capabilities of BRT and incorrectly attribute the high performance and customer acceptance of rail rapid transit to uniquely rail characteristics, such as tracks, rather than to the exclusive guideway, stations, and service quality that are also offered by bus rapid transit. Nevertheless, numerous BRT systems are in the works or already in operation in municipalities around the country. The likelihood is that as BRT systems increase in number and sophistication, they will continue to gain wider acceptance as a new and effective mode of public transportation.

Craig A. Amundsen, AICP, is a principal in urban design for the URS Corporation (formerly BRW) in Minneapolis, MN. This article is adapted from a longer article that will appear in the June issue of American City and County Magazine.



# TakeNote

## Policy Tidbits

*An assortment of things you wouldn't know if you didn't read them here first*

**A Minnesota charter school** sponsored by the LeSueur-Henderson district is one of the semifinalists this year in the search by the Ford Foundation and Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government for important innovations in American government. Minnesota's charter law was a winner in that competition, as an institutional innovation, a year ago.

This underscores the whole point of chartering. 'Charter' is not a kind of school. It's a continuing search for new and different and better kinds of school. Some aren't innovative. Some fail. But some really do discover new forms of schooling. If even one school does, that's major: How many people had to invent the light bulb?

The charter school in the competition this year — the New Country School — has no courses, no classes and no employees. A professional organization of teachers and others runs the program for the board of the non-profit corporation that is the school. With the freedom (and the incentives) the charter law provides and the accountability it imposes, the teachers created a program in which students work on individual and group projects geared to the state's graduation requirements. Expenditure-patterns, the use of time, student roles, teacher roles all are radically different. Teachers are advisers; coaches. The internet is an integral resource.

Finalists will be announced in the summer; the 10 winners in the fall.  
— Ted Kolderie

**The media releases put the best possible spin** on student test scores from Minneapolis and Saint Paul: something about previous gains now "leveling off." Privately as word was leaked ahead to others who might be asked for comment — around city hall, for example — the sense was different. Results this year were "much worse than expected," the Minneapolis city council president, Jackie Cherryhomes, told an audience the night before the news stories appeared.  
—T.K.

**Contrary to our self-image**, the U.S. now ranks 7th in car ownership at 394 cars per 1,000 people. According to the April 21 *Economist* magazine, the top six begins with tiny Luxemburg at 576 followed by Italy, Iceland, Germany, Austria and Australia.

The U.S. ranking is expected to drop even further in the next two years as car sales in the U.S. are forecast to decline by about 20 percent, double the decline expected in the rest of the world. To hear some talk, all Europeans are using trains and mass transit exclusively. The picture must be more complex. —Lyle Wray

**From Ken Orski's Washington newsletter** on urban transportation issues:

"In nearly every city there are highway locations that experience traffic backups on a daily basis. These are usually caused by inadequate roadway design; as, when three lanes merge into two or when entering vehicles must merge into lanes already crowded with other vehicles. Removal of the 167 worst such bottlenecks (ranked by hours of delay) would, it is estimated, result in a 71 per cent decline in rush hour delays, saving each affected commuter an average of 40 minutes each day. A program of traffic-bottleneck elimination might be the most effective single medium-term initiative the federal government could undertake to reduce metropolitan congestion." —T.K.

**Researchers at the Kansas State University** are developing plastic from soybeans and grains. It is part of a program at KSU to find new uses for Kansas agricultural products to give them added value for farmers. Another project involves making adhesives from bio-materials that are environmentally friendly and use no petroleum. Also in development are wheat straw fiberboard products which offer improved insect resistance over wood products, soy oil inks, diesel fuels and lubricants. The U.S. imports nearly 60% of its petroleum and 3% of that goes

into petro-chemicals. "Our economy is hydrocarbon based," according to Robert Madl, director of the research center. "We need to learn how to convert to carbohydrate-based resources, which is crops." For more information see [www.oznet.ksu.edu](http://www.oznet.ksu.edu)  
—Phil Jenni

**MIT has announced a plan** to put almost all of their courseware on the internet with 500 courses over the next two years and 2000 by the end of the decade. The target includes academics in developing countries with limited resources. The cost is estimated to be \$100 million to start. Whether other institutions will follow or whether this move will attract more students to MIT remains to be seen. —L.W.

**John Borchert, who died March 30**, taught more than just the students in his geography classes at the University of Minnesota. He was a principal "teacher" for almost everyone involved in the big thinking-through of metropolitan problems in the Twin Cities area through the 1960s.

The urban study he got attached to the Upper Midwest Economic Study in the late '50s was a major shaping influence, certainly for business leadership. The planning program that appeared in the Humphrey Institute came more under the influence of geographers' thinking than under the influence of architects. More than one Citizens League study committee, as on transportation, came usefully to think in terms of the way urban regions actually grow, and work.  
—T.K.

"Take Note" contributors include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members.

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 Karen Woodward

Thanks to recruiter J.  
 Jerome Boxleitner

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*The Citizens League promotes the public interest in Minnesota by involving citizens in identifying and framing critical public policy choices, forging recommendations and advocating their adoption.*

The Citizens League is an open membership organization. Suggested dues are \$50 for individuals and \$75 for families. For more information, please call 612-338-0791.

**Thanks to this year's Nominating Committee**

Members of this year's Board Nominating Committee were: **George Latimer**, chair, **Marty Adams**, **Andy Brown**, **Arb Sporlein** and **Jane**

**League Board election scheduled for June 30**

Citizens League members have an opportunity to elect eight directors to the League Board. League by-laws require that a Nominating Committee, chaired by the immediate past president, recommend a slate of more than eight candidates to run for a three-year term.

Voting is open to all Citizens League members. An election ballot, with a brief profile of each nominee and instructions for voting, will be mailed to all members on May 25.

The Citizens League Board of Directors is responsible for setting broad policy direction for the League. Perhaps the most important role of the Board is selecting topics for League study committees and approving the policy reports produced by those committees.

The Board is also responsible for assuring that the League has sufficient resources to carry out its mission, a task that has become more challenging as the League's traditional support from corporations and foundations has eroded. Board members are expected to help raise money, make individual contributions and help connect League work to their community connections.

Candidates for the Board this year are:

**Marcia Avner**, Public Policy Director for the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits; **William Diaz**, Senior Fellow

and professor at the University of Minnesota's Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs; **James Everett**, Lutheran Social Services; **Laurel Feddema**, Senior Vice President of Corporate Sponsorships at U. S. Bancorp; **George Garnett**, interim Executive Director, Northside Residents Redevelopment Corporation and principal of Garnett and Associates; **Keith Halleland**, partner, founder and shareholder of Halleland Lewis Nilan Sipkins & Johnson, and chair of the firm's affiliated consulting company, Halleland Health Consulting; **Susan Heegaard**, Director of Government and Community Affairs, Minnesota's Private Colleges, Council, Fund & Research Foundation; **Sean Kershaw**, Deputy Director of Planning and Economic Development, City of St. Paul; **Adeel Lari**, Director of the Research Services, Minnesota Department of Transportation; **George Latimer**, Distinguished professor of Urban Affairs, Macalester College; **Tim Marx**, shareholder, Briggs and Morgan.

According to League by-laws, any member of the League may be nominated for director upon the written petition of 25 League members submitted to League secretary **Gary Cunningham** at least 25 days before the election.

The eight members elected will fill the spots of the follow-

ing Board members whose elected terms expire this year:

Marcia Avner, Jean Harris, Susan Heegaard, Steve Keefe, George Latimer and Robert Vanasek.

League by-laws stipulate that no Board member may serve more than six consecutive years.

Avner, Heegaard and Latimer are eligible for re-election and are on this year's ballot. Harris, Keefe and Vanasek have all served at least three consecutive years and are ineligible for election. Keefe and Harris are eligible for a one-year appointed term, however.

The elected Board members will begin their term at the annual transitional Board meeting already scheduled for Friday, August 10. Officers and additional directors will be

**Durenberger elected VP**

Former US Senator Dave Durenberger was elected Citizens League vice president at the April Board meeting. League President Matthew Ramadan announced to the Board that he intends to step down as President at the end of his term in August. Durenberger will serve as League vice president for the remainder of this Board year and will succeed Ramadan as President in August.

## Kris Lyndon Wilson moves on

After almost three years on the job, Research Associate Kris Lyndon Wilson resigned her position with the Citizens League at the end of April. Since joining the staff in the summer of 1998, Kris staffed the public agenda project and study committees on seniors with disabilities, residential property taxes and mental health. She also programmed many Mind-Openers, wrote for the Minnesota Journal and maintained the League's website. "We're really going to miss Kris," said Executive Director Lyle Wray. "In a short time here she mastered a lot of the arcane detail on things like property taxes that takes others years to know."

League members and friends will still run into Kris in Minnesota's public policy circles, though. She is now working as a government relations specialist with the Association of Metropolitan Municipalities; an organization that represents the collective interests of metro-area cities before the state legislature and the Met Council.

## Scott H. McMahon moves in

Scott McMahon has become the newest Program Associate at the League, replacing Kris Wilson. Scott graduates from Saint John's University this spring with a BA degree in Political Science. While at Saint John's, Scott was a very active member of the school community and with the Student Senate. He also studied in Ireland last fall and spent last summer as an intern with the Council of State Governments in Washington, D.C. A native of Algona, Iowa, Scott enjoys outdoor recreation, especially golf and water sports. Scott's first assignment at the League will be the lead staff person for the energy study. Welcome to the League, Scott.

## Stadium backers urged to prepare ...for the 1977 Legislature

Yes, you read the headline right. Twenty-five years ago this month the CL News reported that Rep. John Tomlinson of St. Paul had told a League breakfast meeting that Governor Wendell Anderson would probably not call a special session to deal with a stadium proposal that Tomlinson had co-authored and that had died in the 1976 session. He was concerned that "a very quiet, ominous silence" from the Vikings and Twins had him worried that they might be considering moving to other cities. Tomlinson urged the Twins and the Vikings to delay such a decision and called for an "unofficial conference committee" to work out the bugs in his proposal and return with a plan for the 1977 Legislature. Of particular concern were issues such as, the location of the stadium and the mix of public and private funding. In the immortal words of Yogi Berra, "it's déjà vu all over again."

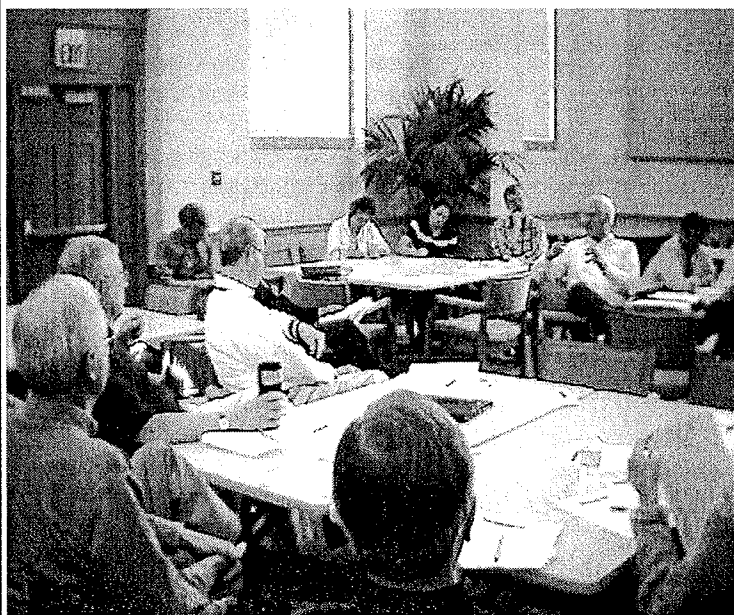
## League study committee *Updates*

Member application forms for the League's new study looking at energy policy in Minnesota will be in the mail shortly, although the committee will probably not begin actually meeting until sometime in June. Co-chairs for the committee will be Board members **Andy Brown**, a partner at the law firm of Dorsey & Whitney and **Ken Keller**, professor of Science, Technology and Public Policy at the Humphrey Institute. Meeting day, time and place have not yet been decided. Staff is currently doing background research on the topic, but we don't expect to get up to full speed until new staff member Scott McMahon starts on June 11.

After more than six months of work, the Committee on School Completion Rates is nearing the finish of its report on improving graduation rates in the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. The committee, chaired by **George Latimer** and **Gary Cunningham**, has heard a great deal of information about the steps that schools can take to motivate students and keep them from dropping out. Some effective practices include early intervention, smaller schools, stronger bonds between teachers and students, and the development of more engaging subject matter. The challenge that remains is securing the systemic adoption of these practices.

Clearly, both Minneapolis and Saint Paul urgently need to do something about the high numbers of students who do not make it to graduation. According to data from the state Department of Children, Families, and Learning, each year's graduating class is missing about 1500 students who dropped out somewhere between ninth and twelfth grade.

For more information about this project, visit the League's web page at <http://www.citizensleague.net>.



**School completion committee studies for finals**