CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 249

What is the Most Useful Approach to the Transportation Problem ?

January 1972

WHAT IS THE MOST USEFUL APPROACH TO THE TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM?

Summary of Remarks by Wayne H. Olson,
President of the Citizens League,
to the Development Guide Committee
of the Metropolitan Council
January 20, 1972

As we talk about "building transit" we must be talking essentially about building usage . . . patronage . . . for this more efficient mode of travel. It is the "market share" of trips that is central. The vehicle system is a means to this end . . . and alternative vehicle systems should be evaluated primarily in terms of their ability to attract trips.

This effort to push up the proportion of trips carried by transit must begin immediately, with the transit system available today -- even if some other and higher-capacity system is to be introduced in the future. The new system will succeed (not least, financially) to the extent the market has been built for it by what we do in the interim.

The selection of the most effective "hardware" is, however, only a part of what must be done to influence significantly the proportion of travel carried by transit. An additional "software" program is also required. This will involve changes in the pricing of the transit and the auto/highway modes (particularly for peak-hour use), probably more priority-access (metered freeway, for example) arrangements now appearing, and a far more consumer-oriented marketing and market-planning effort for transit. This program must also be implemented promptly.

This effort to have a larger share of trips carried in multi-passenger vehicles is required by the peak-hour congestion that will occur on the freeway system, which is increasingly unable to serve both the demand for travel to the employment centers in the middle of the metropolitan area and the demand for travel through the middle of the area, to destinations on the other side. It makes little economic or environmental sense to try to continue to accommodate this travel demand . . . which is a peak-hour problem . . . with additional freeways that will be used to capacity only 20 hours a week by automobiles which are themselves used to capacity almost not at all.

We believe the issues can most usefully be shaped as follows, for the decisions that are required:

1. Is it to be the policy of this metropolitan area, overall and particularly at peak hours, to push up the portion of trips carried in some multi-passenger vehicle . . . or, more specifically, to increase the "role" of transit in total transportation?

2. How will this policy decision on the division of trips between the transit and auto/highway modes be realized?

   * What can the hardware contribute to increased patronage . . . that is, the performance characteristics of the system and its attractiveness when designed with some attention to the requirements of consumers?

* What changes can, and should, be made in the price/service relationship between the transit and auto/highway modes? How, in other words, can the balance be tipped, relatively, now, more in favor of transit as individuals make their decisions about the choice of mode?

* What can and will, realistically, be done directly to influence the pattern of land development . . . and, therefore, the locations of the origins and destinations of trips?

3. Do we propose to make now an overall decision on transit hardware, for all parts of the metropolitan area for the long term? Or shall we approach the decision on the physical system as an evolutionary process, with commitments made incrementally . . . now for one system or for one part of the metropolitan area; later, for another system, or for another part of the region?

4. What source of financing will be developed for transit . . . and, within this, what can realistically be expected in the way of federal aid?

5. What are to be the respective roles and missions of the various agencies? Specifically, of the Minnesota Highway Department and the Metropolitan Transit Commission with respect to responsibility for the engineering and construction of the physical facilities for transit?

6. Once it has been decided what proportion of the growth of travel in the metropolitan area should, and can, be accommodated by an improved transit system, in what form and at what locations is the remaining demand for travel on the auto/highway mode to be satisfied? Are additional freeways required for these trips . . . and, if so, at what specific locations? Or can, and should, these trips be accommodated through an upgrading of the arterial system -- and, if so, at what locations and on what routes?