

Citizens League
530 Syndicate Building
Minneapolis, MN 55402

APPROVED:
Board of Directors
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A FRESH LOOK
AT A NEW DIRECTION
IN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

The Minnesota Legislature seems likely, in 1974, to authorize an immediate expansion of the public bus system in the Twin Cities area. The Citizens League, in a report issued recently, has endorsed this expansion.

With respect to other transit systems, the Legislature seems likely in 1974 to defer action. There is a growing sense that other alternatives (to the plan proposed by the Metropolitan Transit Commission) should be considered further. The Citizens League, in its report strongly endorses this additional analysis, discussion and planning.

The question then arises: Who . . . what public body . . . is to be responsible for taking this fresh look at the new direction in transportation planning? A decision must be made, and this means that proposals must be developed.

In an effort to be responsive to this question, and concerned about the thrust of some of the answers currently proposed, the Citizens League Board of Directors -- after a careful review of the issues -- has adopted the following statement.

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- 1. There needs to be some clarification in 1974 of the relationships among the agencies in the planning and implementation of the regional transportation system.

The confusion and conflict among agencies over transportation plans and decisions is not entirely -- perhaps not even primarily -- the 'fault' of the agencies. It is the result, very largely, of the fact that state law gives the Metropolitan Council responsibility for planning *transportation, broadly*, and the Metropolitan Transit Commission responsibility for planning *transit, specifically*, but the law does not make it clear where one responsibility ends and the other begins. The Legislature has not reconciled these conflicting authorities at critical points over the last several years.

We believe it is widely agreed, in the community and within the Legislature, that this question of relationships must be resolved in 1974.

- 2. Transportation does not fit the conventional model. In transportation, the problem is to provide for the coordination and management of several different -- and in some respects competing -- 'operating' agencies.

Transportation is not like sewers, or airports . . . where the region has, essentially, a single, areawide public agency responsible for all facilities of metropolitan significance.

Rather, in transportation, the responsibility is -- and will continue to be -- divided among several, different public agencies . . . and a number of private agencies: the Highway Department, the Metropolitan Transit Commission, the seven counties, the two large central cities, the school bus operators, the taxi companies, the parking ramp operators, and others.

In this, transportation resembles more the area of open space, or health, or housing, or criminal justice, or education . . . all fields in which there is no *single*, existing agency which can be assigned the detailed work of knitting-together the different operating programs into a total system . . . of performing, in other words, what is known in the proposals now before the Legislature as the preparation of the "development program."

3. The Legislature's objectives are the right ones: to keep the planning truly balanced as among modes, open to new technologies, and motivated to use low-capital alternatives as they become available. It is essential to arrange the organization relationships in a way that ensures these objectives will be achieved.

The discussion in this community about transportation systems is not yet completed. We are continuing to understand more about the nature of our transportation problem. We are continuing to analyze our alternatives. And we are continuing to learn about new options. It is unlikely this discussion will be completed in time for some kind of 'final' decision on an ultimate transportation system within the next eight weeks.

The next stage of planning and coordination should therefore be set up in such a way as to avoid *any risk* that the kind of new thinking it wants will be stifled by organizational commitments to the systems of the past.

4. This means that the key function of transportation planning should not be grafted onto any of the agencies now building and operating the capital-facilities systems -- roads or transit.

The proposed metropolitan reorganization act now under consideration is sound in its provision for a 'development program' to be prepared to carry out the 'policy plan' adopted by the Metropolitan Council.

We urge the Legislature, however, not to approve the proposal now before it, which would assign this 'development program' responsibility in the area of urban transportation to the Metropolitan Transit Commission. We recognize the proposed change of name, or assignment and of members. But it remains basically unsound to establish an arrangement that will require the projects of one agency to be approved or disapproved by an organization which that agency may see as competitive with its own program. We would be equally opposed to a proposal to assign the 'development program' responsibility to the State Highway Department or to the seven county highway departments.

Rather, the body doing transportation planning must be separate from the operators in order that it can deal even-handedly with all, and have the kind of credibility that will permit its decisions to be regarded by all as balanced and fair.

5. The solution is not complicated. Essentially, all that is required is one change in an existing structure -- the Transportation Board -- so it can effectively carry out the coordinating responsibilities presently assigned by the Legislature and the Governor to the Metropolitan Council.

From the beginning of this area's efforts to plan *transportation* about 1958 -- there has always been a general planning and policy body, responsible for the overall framework of metropolitan development. . . the Metropolitan Planning Commission, and later the Metropolitan Council.

There has also been a set of operating agencies, each responsible for planning and constructing its own part of the transportation system . . . the Highway Department, the counties, (later) the Transit Commission.

And there has always been an intermediate body, responsible for knitting-together the proposals of the individual agencies to form a *transportation* program that serves to carry out the transportation element of the overall development guide. At first, this was the so-called Joint Program. Later, it was the Transportation Planning Program. Today it exists as the Transportation Board.

The critical issue now is the design of this intermediate agency.

The problem is not that it does not exist: it is that it does not work. It does not raise major issues effectively. And it does not resolve issues where the interests of the agencies conflict.

It has been expanded, recently, with the addition of local elected officials, rather than engineers. But it still provides far too narrow a base of representation. Too many parties in the community -- that could help raise and resolve issues -- are excluded from this body . . . which is the body in which the area's key transportation policy decisions are going to be made. The people are directly served and affected by transportation, and they deserve to have a seat at the table.

The problem can be solved in the following way:

- a. The Metropolitan Council should reorganize the Transportation Board into a body composed of (1) the existing local government and agency representatives, and (2) an equal number of citizens.

This will simply provide, in transportation, the kind of arrangement established by the Metropolitan Council in every other area in which it has been designated by federal law and/or by state executive order as the planning body for the region. (The Council was designated by Governor Anderson in December, pursuant to federal law, as the area's transportation planning body. The Metropolitan Council also, today, provides staff and administrative services, including office space, to the existing Transportation Board.)

The Metropolitan Council should proceed immediately to make this change.

- b. The Legislature should then make it clear that this Transportation Board, as restructured to include citizens as well as local officials, is to perform the 'development program' function as defined in the Metropolitan Reorganization Act now under consideration.

None of the existing operating agencies would then need to be changed or reorganized.

The process should operate basically as now provided in the bills before the Legislature:

- * The Metropolitan Council would initiate the policy plan, as defined.
- * The operating agencies building projects of metropolitan significance -- the State Highway Department, the counties, the MTC -- would prepare their proposed transportation projects, and submit them to the Transportation Board.
- * The Transportation Board should -- using the policy plan prepared by the Council -- assemble the proposed projects into an integrated transportation development program for submission to and approval by the Metropolitan Council.

This arrangement we propose will not further complicate the arrangements for transportation decision-making. It will not, for example, create a new and additional level of review.

6. It is imperative that this decision on the organization and relationships of the transportation agencies not become or be regarded as a decision on the particular transportation or transit system that is to be developed.

It is generally understood, we think, that early in the 1973 session these issues were separated . . . with the Legislature intending to act on the 'system' question separately.

The object, in redesigning the transportation planning organization, is to create a mechanism able to pursue in a balanced and independent fashion the new directions that may be set in the decisions the Legislature makes.