

Citizens League
530 Syndicate Building
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402

STATEMENT BY THE CITIZENS LEAGUE
TO THE METROPOLITAN COUNCIL
HEARING ON THE TRANSPORTATION POLICY PLAN
WEDNESDAY, JULY 16, 1975

We are pleased to have this opportunity to present our views on this subject of major interest and importance.

The Policy Plan is the key and controlling document in the Twin Cities area's transportation decision, under the process set up by the Minnesota Legislature. The policies adopted in this plan represent the major choices of the community about its future transportation system. And these choices shape and determine the nature of the development programs, for rights-of-way and for vehicles, that can be proposed by the various 'operating' agencies. So the draft before us now deserves and requires the most careful consideration.

Broadly, on the basis of its past reports on transportation, the Citizens League is supportive of the draft plan. There are, however, three points of significant concern we would like to discuss. In the interest of time, it seems most useful to deal -- in this statement -- with what we believe are the issues in controversy. They relate mainly to 'transit.'

1. The plan focuses disproportionately on roads and public transit, and fails to deal adequately with the non-governmental elements that account for a large part of 'the transportation problem'.

This is, in a sense, understandable. Urgent issues are presented by the large public agencies -- the MTC, the Highway Department, the counties -- for whose capital and operating programs the Metropolitan Council must provide general direction and guidance. The roads, and the public bus fleet, are of major importance.

So, too, however, are the non-governmental elements of the area's transportation system -- the facilities for vehicle storage (parking ramps, parking lots, private garages), and the area's automobiles which make up perhaps 99 per cent of the vehicle fleet. It is here that the big operational costs are incurred, that the fuel is consumed, that the pollution is generated, and that the congestion is created.

We would urge again, in the most serious way, what we said in our reports in 1973 and 1974: that the two 'modes' of transportation are not 'highways' and 'transit', but simply 'driving alone' and 'riding' . . . that the objective of the Council's policy should be to work down the amount of driving alone, and to increase the proportion of persons riding . . . that the goal, therefore, is not to get persons 'out of their cars' but

to get persons 'out from behind the wheel' . . . that a successful program is not inherently a capital-facilities program, but a ridership-development program . . . and that all vehicles, therefore, are transit vehicles.

The plan should include policies relating to facilities and (especially) to vehicles that are not in public ownership.

Other development guides and policy plans of the Metropolitan Council have, in this way, embraced the full system they were intended to cover -- governmental elements and non-governmental elements alike. The guide, or plan, for housing, for example, deals with more than public housing. And the guide, or plan, for health has dealt with the private hospitals and with the pattern of private medical practice. It has included, also, policies relating to non-capital actions as well as to capital facilities: the health maintenance organization, for example.

This draft of the transportation policy plan begins with a view broad enough to see the fleet of private vehicles as part of the 'transit' system. And it recognizes the potential -- in the effort to reduce vehicle-miles-travelled -- of increases in the occupancy of these private vehicles. This is sound.

But the plan does not follow through adequately with policies addressed to these non-governmental and non-physical elements of the system: policies, for example, providing guidance with respect to the construction of parking, and the charges for parking . . . the staggering of work hours . . . the provision for transportation in the design of new residential, commercial and industrial developments . . . the subsidy of transportation costs by employers . . . the encouragement of various forms of 'shared-ride' service.

Quite likely this is because no non-governmental agency exists that is charged to develop and promote these forms of 'para-transit' or shared-ride service, which will probably rely heavily on private vehicles. Possibly it is not and should not be within the authority of the Metropolitan Council or any public body actually to bring such an agency into being. But it remains useful, in the policy plan, to identify these non-governmental elements of the development program, and the need for their effective implementation.

2. The plan does not set forth clearly a policy on the appropriate level of cost and subsidy.

Concern about the cost, and effectiveness, of transportation facilities and service is growing -- in the federal government, in the Legislature, in the MTC, and in the community. These issues should be addressed in a major way by this plan.

The Metropolitan Reorganization Act requires the plan to include a general statement on the level of public expenditure, capital and operating, appropriate to the service and facilities. The present draft does not respond adequately to this requirement. Some policies of very major importance are proposed, with respect to the levels of service to be provided, on the road system and by transit. The cost implications should be much more clearly analyzed, and spelled-out.

It is not enough simply to deploy transit service. It will be essential to know as precisely as possible what a given level of transit service will do, at a given place at a given time, to divert persons from driving to riding.

Our concern that these costs be analyzed more carefully is not specifically a concern that the Twin Cities area might, under the plan, be 'spending too much'. The most expensive transportation system of all, we recognize, is the present system of travel by persons alone in their automobiles.

Our concern -- while coming partly from an interest in seeing the cost of the alternative system be kept as low as possible -- stems mainly from our recognition also that the savings in automobile use will be achieved only if people do actually quit driving, and begin riding. We cannot disagree with the assumption in the plan that the Twin Cities area is unlikely at any early date actually to prohibit driving-alone. Any alternative system will depend for its success, therefore, on its ability to persuade persons to ride. And, since the service advantages of transit tend to be balanced by other dis-advantages, the determining factor in many if not most cases is likely to be the relative economics of the two modes. It will be imperative, therefore, to have a really clear understanding of the situations in which riding does or does not offer a compelling advantage compared with the cost of driving alone.

More specifically, there are three questions with respect to what is proposed in the plan that need to be raised, and resolved.

- a. Is the express bus really the most cost-effective system for long-distance service to the central business districts of Minneapolis and St. Paul?

For most of its history, the bus system carried people mainly to the CBDs, on routes extending not much beyond the city limits of St. Paul and Minneapolis. It was only after public acquisition of the transit system that the express routes were extended heavily out into the suburbs. These express routes have been popular. But, as the MTC has indicated, they are quite expensive: The service is peak-hour service, with vehicles and drivers idle much of the middle of the day; typically, too, the back-haul is not a revenue-producing run, but a 'dead-head.'

The plan seems to suggest that this express service be provided by the express bus. It does not sufficiently examine the cost of such service from the outlying subregions, either with respect to some policy on overall transit costs or in relation to the cost of other vehicle systems that might be available. While perhaps this policy plan ought not to be specific as to hardware, some guidance in cost and benefit terms should be provided to the agency or agencies responsible for developing and operating this CBD/commuter service.

Our Citizens League report in 1974 pointed to the mounting costs of the long-distance express bus service, and identified some potential alternatives -- in the carpool and its variations. The respective cost and effectiveness of these alternative systems need to be identified, and compared.

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Minutes of Meeting

COMMUNITY INFORMATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday, February 20, 1974

Dain Tower Cafeteria -- 7:30 a.m.

PRESENT: Wayne H. Olson, Chairman, Geri Joseph, Charles Backstrom, Verne C. Johnson, Greer Lockhart and staff: Ted Kolderie, Paul Gilje, and Glen Skovholt.

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:00 a.m. by Chairman Wayne Olson. A revised draft of the statement on metropolitan structure was distributed to committee members, and the first few minutes of the meeting were spent by committee members reviewing the draft.
2. In the discussion of the statement draft, the committee expressed the view that it should be revised to make it clear that the action the Legislature is about to take which concerns us is not an overt or conscious effort on the part of the Legislature. The committee also felt that the statement should give greater emphasis to the effect a change in the selection process of operating commission members would have on the relationship between the Metropolitan Council and those agencies, and place less emphasis on the question of the election of Metropolitan Council members.
3. It was agreed that the statement would be presented verbally to the Board of Directors and would incorporate these proposed changes.
4. The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 a.m.

Glen Skovholt
Staff

- b. How large an operating loss will occur, and how large an operating loss will be accepted, for the 'local' service within a sub-region?

The facts do show, and the plan documents, that most of the job destinations lie outside the CBDs, and even outside the central cities; and that something like half the trips to work are of five miles or less.

It is clear, as well, that these relatively short worktrips (i.e., other than to the CBDs) are not well served, or are not served at all, by transit. The question is whether they can be. The suburban sub-regions, at least, are areas of very high auto ownership. For short trips, the out-of-pocket costs for driving are quite low. Parking is typically free. When service by transit is slower or otherwise inferior, a serious question therefore must be raised about patronage, or -- alternatively -- about the level of subsidy required to secure patronage. Only through some such policy can the agencies responsible for providing service have some real guidance about what type of vehicle system to install.

- c. Is it really possible that the expanded bus system contemplated in the plan could operate at the same level of cost-per-ride as the system in the Twin Cities area has, in 1974?

This is what seems to be claimed, by the table on Page 53: In constant dollars, the average total cost per passenger and the average operating cost per passenger are both expected to be, in 1990, with 2100 buses, what they were in 1974, with 830 buses. In fact, the Plan projects a slight decline.

The plan suggests, however, that the additional buses will be deployed in types of service that will be both higher in cost and lower in revenue than the buses in service today. There would be more long-distance express service, for example; and more local service to employment and shopping centers in the suburbs, where densities and volumes are lower.

Our sense that this kind of an expansion of service would result in higher, not lower, levels of cost per passenger seems to be supported by the figures on the actual changes experienced in the area's bus system over the past five years of expansion. This is reflected in the table attached.

For these several reasons, we strongly urge that the Plan be approved with the indication that it is 'tentative' on these points, and that steps be taken immediately to begin the cost-analysis needed to resolve these questions.

3. The plan should address the need for new institutional arrangements to carry out the broader transportation development program that is needed.

It is clear that the transportation system involves more than government, and more than simply capital facilities and equipment. An adequate development program must be similarly broad in scope. So, therefore, must the organization charged to prepare it.

On several occasions over the past seven years the Citizens League has urged the importance of vesting in some appropriate areawide body, new or existing, a clear responsibility for 'managing' the transportation system in all its

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elements, public and private. Such a body should have the capability to monitor all the indicators that reflect system performance: the inventory of roads and vehicles; the changing proportion persons riding and driving; the costs of operating the public and private vehicles; congestion; travel times; gasoline consumption; pollution; personal injury and property damage; and for reporting changes annually. It should propose, annually, not only a program of capital facilities but also a program of non-capital actions to help move toward the goals of reduced congestion, pollution, energy consumption and cost: changes, that is, in subsidies . . . in prices . . . in regulations . . . in incentives and disincentives for riding and driving.

The Metropolitan Council is under general charge from the Legislature to propose improvements in the organization of the major systems for which it bears a planning responsibility. We urge the Council to propose, in this plan or separately to the 1976 Legislature, the assignment of this responsibility to an agency that can work between the Council (as general policy-maker) on the one hand, and the various operating bodies, on the other -- the bus operator, the Highway Department, the counties, the taxi operators, the parking ramp owners, etc. With the new requirements of state law, and with the growing federal concern for effectiveness and for long-range capital programming, the need for a body with a vested interest not in any particular system, but simply in whatever moves toward objectives best, at least cost, and at the earliest date, has become urgent.

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