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Transportation Planning in the Rochester Metropolitan Region*

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TRANSPORTATION PLANNING IN THE ROCHESTER METROPOLITAN REGION

by

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Summary

This report concludes that the "1990 Plan" of the Rochester Metropolitan Transportation Study (RMTS) does not provide a suitable framework for ecologically sound land use and development in the metropolitan region. In effect, it is a projection of present use rather than a plan to bring about necessary changes in transportation practices.

In order to attain a more desirable pattern of growth, we submit the following recommendations:

1. Transportation planning should be used to discourage scattered land use and uncontrolled growth. Fixed route (rail) rapid transit should be explored as a method of achieving desirable development patterns. A first step in implementing this principle is to consider seriously the 1967 report "Modern Rail Transit" which was produced for Monroe County by the firm of Seelye Stevenson Value and Knecht.
2. Reduction of pollution and conservation of natural resources should be prime goals of RMTS planners. Maximum efficiency in the use of all resources must be accepted as a transportation goal.
3. The RMTS should direct some effort at identifying changes in regional political boundaries and zoning practices which would aid the implementation of effective transportation/land-use planning. These findings would be transmitted to local officials as recommendations.

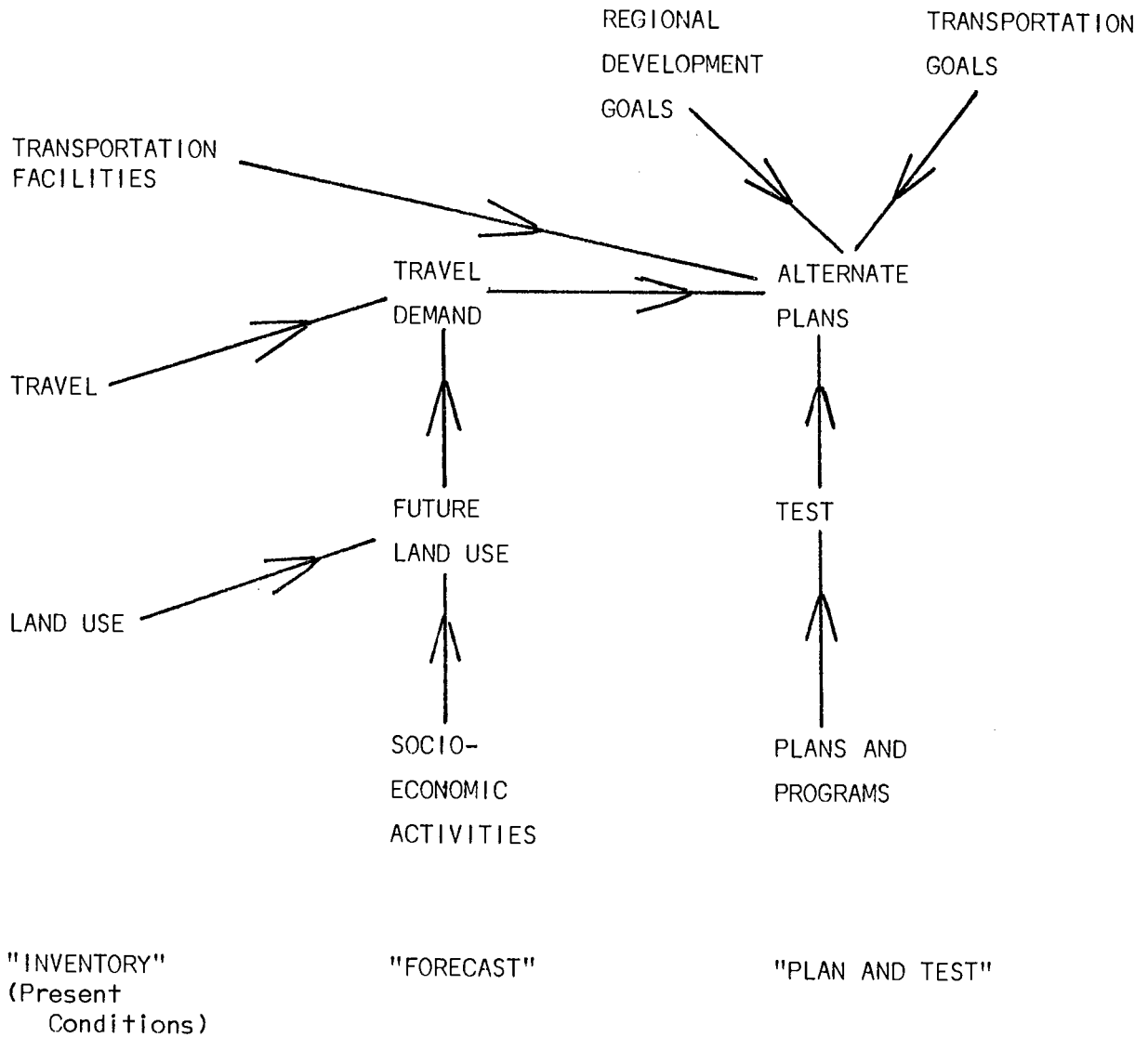
The Origin and Function of the RMTS

The Rochester Metropolitan Transportation Study (RMTS) was created in 1963 to meet the needs of the 1962 Federal Highway Act and channel federal highway funds to this region. The Study is guided by a Policy Committee of local officials with the assistance of a Planning Committee of area professionals who deal with transportation and related problems. The actual technical work of the Study is performed by the New York State Department of Transportation. It should be noted that these technical services are carried out in Albany, not Rochester.

Although the RMTS is an ongoing function, one major planning document has emerged: "The 1990 Transportation Plan" (1). Acceptance of this document as future transportation policy is contained in the following statement: "The Policy Committee of the Rochester Metropolitan Transportation Study adopts the concept of

'The 1990 Transportation Plan' and its use as a guide in developing transportation projects as they relate to the orderly development of Rochester and Monroe County." (2)

The RMTS transportation planning process may be summarized in a diagram as shown below: (3)



CRITIQUE OF PRINCIPAL SECTIONS OF THE "1990 PLAN"

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The RMTS relates its regional development goals to the 1964 City of Rochester "Comprehensive Master Plan" and the 1964 Monroe County Master Plan "Design for the Future." (4) One of the most important goals of the County Master Plan is to avoid

"scatteration". This is explained in the following quotation from the County Master Plan:

"While the abundance of good land is a blessing in many ways, it does have its disadvantages. Without severe physical limitations to confine urban development, there is a tendency for new growth to be scattered widely throughout the county. This has become increasingly possible on a large scale through the widespread use of automobiles coupled with the construction of modern highways. If the trend continues, it will not be long before most of the outlying parts of the county lose their pleasing quality and become an incongruous mixture of rural and suburban land uses. Scattered development of this type tends to undermine the continued use of land for agricultural purposes, and at the same time causes expensive inefficiencies in the provision of necessary public services such as police and fire protection, water supply, sewage disposal, trash collection, and school transportation, not to mention the numerous commercial services such as milk and fuel deliveries.

Another criticism of "scatteration" is that it fails to produce a satisfactory residential environment. Good design of residential areas calls for freedom from the noise and danger of high-speed or heavy traffic, for provision of safe pedestrian circulation and safe play areas for children, and for the grouping of homes to form neighborhoods of sufficient size to permit efficient installation of utilities and the provision of community services such as schools, shops, and churches in nearby locations. These features are generally lacking in scattered development." (5)

With this in mind, we wish to emphasize that scattered growth is very dependent on the random-route (automotive) transportation system. According to Tabor Stone, "the very nature of the random-route system -- that of serving most effectively those activities which are decentralized -- dictated the character of suburbia. The point is that land use configurations must, to a great extent conform to the nature of the transportation systems that serve them." (6)

Scattered growth does not result from transportation habits alone, but from the absence of metropolitan land-use policy and control. However, in one view, transportation planning is the only effective regional planning that presently exists. If this is significantly correct, TRANSPORTATION PLANNING SHOULD BE USED TO ENCOURAGE DESIRABLE REGIONAL GROWTH PATTERNS. The fundamental deficiency of the RMTS is its lack of attention to the relation between land-use and transportation. Indeed, the "1990 Plan" supports the very type of regional development deplored by the 1964 Monroe County Master Plan.

#### FUTURE LAND-USE

Although this category would seem to be related closely to "Regional Development Goals", it appears to be treated separately by the RMTS. In the "1990 Plan" future land-use is based on projection, and today's land-use patterns are assumed to continue into the future; thus we may expect the future to be more of today. According to the "1990 Plan", "there is no evidence to indicate that growth in the Rochester area will not continue to spread out in a generally concentric pattern about the area's historic center, i.e., downtown Rochester." (7) A map of projected population increase (8) suggests that RMTS planners expect increased scatteration in the future. By predicting scattered growth and designing the transportation system accordingly, RMTS planners add force toward acceptance of this fate

for our region. According to R.A. Gakenheimer, "Transportation planning based on projection tends to 'implement' the projection as though it were policy statement." (9)

The RMTS still has the opportunity to consider the effects of alternate land-use patterns on transportation systems. Up to this time, however, the RMTS has given no evidence that it is concerned with the transportation implications of alternative zoning and regional development patterns.

There has already been at least one significant statement of dissatisfaction with this narrow scope of activity. Dr. Stuart Denslow, Executive Director of the Genesee-Finger Lakes Regional Planning Board, concluded that the "1990 Plan" is "based on the assumption that what we now perceive as the area's development pattern will continue... I am totally dissatisfied with the way urban areas have developed. We have not heretofore considered imaginative alternatives." (10) (We note that Dr. Denslow is a member of the RMTS Planning Committee. A complete list of RMTS members is given in an appendix to this report.)

#### TRAVEL DEMAND

The RMTS assumes that road traffic will continue to increase at growing rates. This ever-increasing traffic is accepted as inevitable, if not actually desirable. The "1990 Plan" fails to ask the fundamental question: what is the true purpose of transportation? According to Lewis Mumford, "The prime purpose of passenger transportation is not to increase the amount of physical movement but to increase the possibilities for human association, cooperation, human intercourse, and choice." (11) Since motorized transportation pollutes the environment and consumes natural resources at alarming rates, a proper role for transportation planners is to attempt to reduce traffic. To quote Mr. Mumford once again, "Those who believe that transportation is the chief end of life should be put in orbit at a safe lunar distance from the earth."

#### TRANSPORTATION GOALS

"Transportation Goals" appear to be predominantly related to transportation system economies. This approach tends to ignore other important goals which cannot as easily be fed into a computer.

One of the non-economic RMTS transportation goals is the promotion of a "Better Urban Environment". (12) This goal is related to economics since a better urban environment would probably attract tourists and shoppers which would bring increased prosperity to the area and lower taxes. However, "better urban environment" cannot be immediately computed in dollars; therefore, it is not used to form the initial basis for comparing alternative systems. There is no part of the RMTS report which suggests that their planning policies actually do promote a better urban environment. Logically, such an environment is promoted by mass transit because of the resulting efficient use of land in the urban region. Mass transit results in a reduction in right-of-way acreage, including interchanges. Central city land needed for parking is also reduced, and the downtown is quieter with better air.

The RMTS regards public transit as something which should be provided only for those who do not have cars or who cannot drive. It is quite a different attitude to provide and encourage mass transit for motorists who would prefer to use it if it were available. Possibilities of private mass transit for large employment centers such as Kodak and Xerox have not been considered in the RMTS report. This type of transit (company owned or leased busses) would become extremely attractive if busses were given the right-of-way on major arterials and expressways at peak travel hours. This is one example where the RMTS could be of great service by studying methods for the more efficient use of existing roads.

## PLANS AND PROGRAMS

The "1990 Plan" relies on computer simulation of traffic conditions to suggest feasible highway and expressway networks as well as to estimate the mix of public and private transit. The projection for the 1990 mix is overwhelmingly in favor of automotive traffic. In 1990, the RMTS expects public transit to carry 3.6% of person-trips in the metropolitan area. Capital costs of the recommended expressway corridor plan (not including other highway construction costs such as road widenings) are predicted to be \$210,000,000 while the capital costs of public transit are predicted to be \$50,000,000.

It is quite possible that the emphasis on highway building is not based on logic and imagination but on Federal and State Transportation Departments' historical support of such programs. Consequently, the availability of funds becomes the very reason for building expressways. The 1970 Federal Urban Mass Transit Transportation Assistance Act is an indication of new attitudes toward public transit, and the RMTS could reconsider its proposals accordingly.

Since most of the expressways proposed by the RMTS had been included in maps published several years before the "1990 Plan", the effect of the RMTS has simply been to justify, at great expense, highways previously planned by the New York State Department of Transportation (formerly Department of Public Works). Such closed-circuit thinking can be avoided by the assignment of the technical work of long range planning efforts to agencies which are not directly involved with a particular transportation mode. (Theoretically the State Department of Transportation considers all forms of transportation -- but federal highway funding policy and their training and background in highway planning form a strong bias in favor of automotive transportation.)

In studying the bibliography of the "1990 Plan" we find no mention of the 1967 report "An Action Program - Mass Transit - Monroe County, New York" prepared by the firm of Seelye Stevenson Value and Knecht. This independent study, financed by Monroe County, begins by noting that, "there was a period, not too long ago, in which many responsible parties believed that the solution (to the transportation problem) was a network of high speed modern expressways supplemented by underground parking or parking garages. The metropolitan Los Angeles area has invested millions in this method and the situation today is chaotic." (14) The Seelye report advocates a system of rail rapid transit utilizing existing rail lines and rights-of-way including the abandoned subway system.

Indeed, the generally neglected Seelye report agrees with the views of modern transportation planners. We quote from Beyond the Automobile by Tabor Stone:

"We can use transportation as an active land-use planning tool; by committing our regional commuter movements to rail, we can be sure that we can accommodate our booming population in an orderly fashion and we can assure the development of regional urban environments as comprehensive entities, not as chaotic growths... I must stress the urgency for transferring commuter movements to fixed-route systems, not only to rescue us from worsening congestion problems, but also to spare us from the environmental damage caused by the expansion of the regional roadway network, which grows and grows as congestion problems grow. I am convinced that we must act quickly to prevent expressway construction from making great segments of the urban and suburban environment simply unfit for human habitation... The only responsible method for handling our future transportation situation is to recognize the functional and environmental characteristics of the system types available, determine what we wish the environmental land-use to be, and structure the transportation system accordingly. In short, we must recognize that transportation planning is, to a significant extent, land-use planning." (15)

### Political Context of Transportation Planning

A severe restriction of effective transportation/land-use planning is the fragmentation and uneven quality of land-use controls in the metropolitan region. Suburban residents throughout the country believe that they have "escaped" their cities' problems, and there appears to be little enthusiasm for sharing responsibilities, including zoning and taxation on a metropolitan rather than a local basis. In Monroe County there are approximately 30 political entities, implying 30 different sets of zoning regulations. Under present conditions metropolitan land-use policies are difficult, if not impossible, to implement.

Roger Creighton is a leader in the field of urban highway planning, and his influence may be seen in the technical features of the RMTS planning process. He was director of the professional staff of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Study, and several members of the RMTS staff were associated with him there. In the beginning of his new book, Urban Transportation Planning, he states that

"the evidence... suggests strongly that metropolitan planning in the United States under our current economic and governmental procedures is impossible... Under these circumstances, the best that can be done is to prepare transportation plans to the best of one's ability, trusting that in time greater understanding of urban development and firmer controls will allow a more productive coordination to take place." (16)

If effective transportation planning is impossible because of the fragmentation of land-use policy in the metropolitan region, then the RMTS might well direct its studies toward possible changes in political boundaries and zoning practices which would aid the implementation of effective transportation/land-use planning.

## REFERENCES

1. New York State Department of Transportation Publication FR080221 (The 1990 Plan), 1969.
2. Ibid., p.2.
3. Ibid., p.13.
4. Ibid., p.21.
5. Monroe County Planning Council, Design for the Future, 1964, pp.7-8.
6. Tabor R. Stone, Beyond the Automobile (Engelwood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971), p. 45.
7. "1990 Plan", p. 21.
8. Ibid.,p.22.
9. R.A. Gakenheimer, "Urban Transportation Planning: An Overview", in Taming Megalopolis, Vol. 1 (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), p.392.
10. Stated at the R.I.T. Symposium: "Transportation in Metropolitan Rochester" on 11/5/70. Quoted in the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle on 11/6/70.
11. Lewis Mumford, "Transportation: A Failure of Mind", New York Times, 3/15/71, p.35.
12. "1990 Plan", p.12.
13. Ibid., p.36.
14. Seelye Stevenson Value and Knecht, "An Action Program - Mass Transit-Monroe County, N.Y.", 1967, p. 23.
15. Stone, loc. cit., pp.91-92.
16. Roger Creighton, Urban Transportation Planning (Urbana: Univ. Of Illinois, 1970), pp.17-18.



## APPENDIX

## LIST OF RMTS MEMBERS

## POLICY COMMITTEE

Gordon Howe (committee chairman), county manager, Monroe County  
 John Baybutt, chairman, Planning Council, Monroe County  
 D. David Brandon, director, N.Y.S. Office of Planning Coordination  
 Neal Moylan, commissioner, N.Y.S. Department of Commerce  
 Theodore Parker, commissioner, N.Y.S. Department of Transportation  
 William Cullinan, area manager, Federal Aviation Administration  
 Judah Gribetz, regional administrator, U.S. Department of Housing  
 and Urban Development  
 Robert Kirkby, division engineer, Bureau of Public Roads, U.S. Department  
 of Transportation  
 Kenneth W. Shiatte, (committee secretary), director, Planning and Research  
 Bureau, N.Y.S. Department of Transportation  
 Mayor Stephen May, mayor, City of Rochester  
 Angello Chiarella, chairman, Midtown Holdings Corporation  
 Joseph Ferrari, President of the Monroe County Legislature  
 Robert Black, chairman of the Rochester Genesee Regional Transportation Authority  
 Charles Buck, chairman of the Genesee-Finger-Lakes Regional Planning Board  
 Richard Wielie, Office of Planning Services  
 Kermit Hall, city manager, City of Rochester

## PLANNING COMMITTEE

Stuart Denslow, executive director, Genesee-Finger-Lakes Regional  
 Planning Board  
 Myron Elkins, district director, Office of Planning Coordination  
 Alexander Gray, director, Public Works Department, Monroe County  
 Alexander Morris, director, Bureau of Traffic Engineering, City of  
 Rochester  
 James Reading, manager, Rochester Transit System, City of Rochester  
 Ann Taylor, director, Rochester Planning Commission, City of Rochester  
 William Uptegrove, director, Planning Council, Monroe County  
 Frank Batstone, chief, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
 William Carr, director of transportation, U.S. General Post Office  
 John Komich, chief, Airports Branch, U.S. Federal Aviation Administration  
 Russell Machol, programming and planning engineer, Bureau of Public  
 Roads, U.S. Department of Transportation  
 Kenneth W. Shiatte, (committee secretary), director, Planning and Research  
 Bureau, N.Y.S. Department of Transportation  
 Robert Tylock, chairman, Regional Planning and Engineering, N.Y.S.  
 Dept. of Transportation  
 William Keefe, City commissioner of Public Works  
 Robert Spellman, Administrative Director of Urban Renewal and Economic  
 Development, City of Rochester  
 William Finche, Director of Monroe County Data Processing  
 Robert Aex, Executive Director of Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation  
 Authority