Introduction

For 40 years, American cities and towns have had to live with the unintended consequences of transportation policies not guided by concepts of community, equity, and quality of life, but rather driven by a decision-making paradigm, which unconsciously assumed, a priori, that transportation is somehow a value-free instrumentality of people's desires to get from A to B, no questions asked. Since the Interstate era began in 1956, transportation has been viewed by planners and politicians alike as being primarily, often entirely, a matter of supporting the economy.

Transportation planning methodologies, models and data have been developed that focus almost exclusively on "the work trip," notwithstanding the fact that today the simple home-work-home trip chain accounts for a mere 14.1 percent of all person trips. (1) Remarkably, non-work trips now account for 70.0 percent of all person trips; transportation planning-and decision-making-methodologies have barely even scratched the surface of what, in effect, is more than two-thirds of the transportation "consumer market."(2)

In effect, large portions of our society (e.g. the elderly, the poor, women with both job and family responsibilities) have been consigned to the backwaters of transportation policy and decision-making.

Ironically, involvement in transportation by institutions whose primary concern is empowering and assisting those same groups of people has been mostly peripheral. Social service agencies, health care providers, charitable organizations, community activists, and philanthropic foundations seem to have accepted the notion that the transportation system is a constraint to be coped with, not a potential asset to help carry out their primary missions.

Yet apart from entitlement programs, surface transportation is the nation's largest domestic spending program at over $100 billion per year.(3) Is it unreasonable to expect-if not require-that our nation's transportation policies and investments should be harnessed to help address some of our pressing social problems?
What The ISTEA Does and Doesn't Do

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 broke important new ground by envisioning an approach to transportation planning, programming, and funding in which people and communities matter, by attempting to move away from the traditional strategy of simply accommodating increases in vehicular demand, and by underscoring the importance of meaningfully addressing questions of social equity, economic efficiency, environmental and aesthetic degradation, energy conservation, and impact on quality of life and community livability.

The hallmarks of this new approach may be found in the ISTEA's "Declaration of Policy" (2), the very first paragraph of which states:

"It is the policy of the United States to develop a National Intermodal Transportation System that is economically efficient, environmentally sound, provides the foundation for the Nation to compete in the global economy, and will move people and goods in an energy-efficient manner."

The ISTEA articulates a new vision not only of the positive contributions that transportation can make to the economy, but also of a new transportation decision-making paradigm premised on the idea of synergistic, rather than antagonistic, linkages among goals of economic productivity, environmental protection, access and mobility, and revitalization of our nation's urban and rural communities.

One of the cornerstones of the ISTEA is increased public participation in the transportation planning process. What has traditionally passed as "citizen involvement" has been a generally superficial process whereby the people whose lives are most impacted are haphazardly brought in, usually fairly late in the game, and given little if any chance of understanding, evaluating, and expressing preferences for a meaningful diversity of options in full light of their transportation, environmental, and community impacts.

The ISTEA seeks to change all that by setting up a planning and decision-making paradigm that invites-indeed, welcomes-a diverse array of stakeholders to get involved and stay involved in deciding how transportation can play a meaningful part in addressing the problems of marginalized citizens and communities.

But the ISTEA only sets the stage and puts the institutional machinery in place. This new vision of transportation as an instrument of social policy will not, indeed cannot, just happen. Wishing will not make it so. The ISTEA puts in place the framework for a new vision of transportation in America, but it is only the first step in a very, very long journey.

It's worth noting that the transportation "pipeline" is a long one. State and metropolitan transportation plans currently being developed have, at minimum, a 20-year time frame. Although there are lots of opportunities to make a difference in the near term, anyone
who wants to have a say on how transportation is going to affect the lives of Americans in the 21st century needs to get involved now.

This monograph examines some of the transportation-related issues that affect three principle groups: the elderly; the poor; and women (particularly working women). There are obviously overlaps, but taken together, the people in these groups comprise over 70 percent of America. Yet, as stated above, transportation decision-making processes have barely scratched the surface of opportunity for making significant, positive contributions to improving their quality of life.

The readers of this paper are challenged to join in the effort to seize the opportunity provided by the ISTEA to reverse 40 years of neglect and oversight, and to help achieve an American transportation future where people are the ultimate bottom line.

Access To Opportunity

The period from 1970 to 1990 witnessed significant deconcentrations of population and employment in the nation’s metropolitan areas. During the 1980s, suburbs were the engine of metropolitan employment growth, but huge concentrations of poor, often minority, populations remained behind in central cities. A combination of inadequate and faltering urban transit systems, a high percentage of households without an automobile, and the spatial disconnect between where poor people live and where the jobs are results in a significant transportation-related barrier to breaking the poverty cycle.

Overall, almost 80 percent of Americans live in urbanized areas. In 1990, for the first time ever, a majority (nearly 125 million) of Americans lived in the 39 metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) of 1 million or more persons. From 1970 to 1990, the population in these 39 MSAs increased 34 percent, compared to a 22 percent increase in the national population. Even while these MSAs were growing, the population within them was deconcentrating to the suburbs; during the 20 year period, the total population within the large cities of these 39 MSAs increased by only 0.9 million persons, while the total suburban population increased by 30.2 million persons.

But even as the suburbs (and ex-urbs) were growing, fueled by cheap land made accessible by beltways and urban interstates, concentrations of people living in poverty in central cities intensified. According to Jargowsky and Bane,(4) there was a 50 percent increase in concentrated poverty in the nation’s 50 largest cities from 1970 to 1980, with nearly 25 percent of the large city poor population living in extremely poor neighborhoods in 1980. According to Mark Alan Hughes,(5) "concentration of poverty is important because poor persons living in poor neighborhoods might be less able to escape from poverty than poor persons living in more diverse neighborhoods."

During the 1980s, this trend continued. In 23 of the 30 largest cities, the poverty rate increased, and, by 1990, a larger fraction of metropolitan poverty was concentrated in cities in nearly all of the largest metro areas.(6) Hughes concludes that:
"While the rest of the urban system in the U.S. gallops along toward a new regional balance and a new suburban settlement structure, enormous concentrations of the poor and of minorities, especially African-Americans, are being left behind in locations that are disconnected from the resources and opportunities that are essential for mobility."(7)

This "new suburban settlement structure" is premised on mobility made possible by the private automobile. Yet in 1983, 40 percent of households with incomes under $10,000 had no access to a vehicle. Moreover, even for the working poor who do have a vehicle, the cost of mobility in this low density urban form is a regressive burden on limited family budgets.

Issue #1: Getting a Job

For economic or other reasons, people living in poverty in our central cities have experienced relatively greater difficulty in changing their place of residence in response to the deconcentration of employment into the suburbs. Lack of access to an automobile, and the lack of reasonably available public transit options, make it all the more difficult to overcome other existing informational, organizational, and social factor barriers to finding employment.

Issue #2: Keeping a Job: Depending on the Auto

For people below or near the poverty level, getting a job is just a step toward achieving the goal of self-sufficiency. Employers everywhere expect their employees to be at work on a regular and timely basis. There are a growing number of working parents who remain poor, and they walk an economic tightrope. Their fragile household budgets can be quickly and permanently upset by simple, random events that would be no more than a temporary irritation to people with higher incomes. Often, reliable transportation makes the difference in being able to keep a job. Cars owned by poor people tend to be older, and are both more expensive to operate and more frequently in need of repair. Unexpected-and unaffordable-repair costs can spell the end of the mobility needed to keep a job.

Issue #3: Keeping a Job: Depending on Public Transit

Another implication of the deconcentration of our metropolitan areas is that people who do not have access to automobiles find that public transit is increasingly ill-suited to providing timely and dependable access from the central city to suburban job sites. Many public transit systems are underfunded, systems are still downtown-oriented, and suburban industrial/office parks and shopping malls, where the greatest job growth has occurred, were developed without regard for access by public transit. In St. Louis, for example, a study found that fully half of all of the jobs in the region were totally inaccessible by public transit-and that number was even higher for entry-level service jobs.(8)
Issue #4: The Regressive Cost of Transportation

The cost of transportation, whether by auto or public transportation, is a regressive component of family budgets. This is exacerbated by federal tax policy which provides greater incentives for employers to subsidize employees’ parking rather than mass transit, by public transit subsidy structures that pour disproportionate financial resources into suburban commuter rail and express bus services, and by hidden subsidies to the continued building and use of suburban and ex-urban highway systems.

Issue #5: Rural Isolation

Farm mechanization, economic policies, and other factors have left significant numbers of people in rural areas without the means to earn a living. The distances from even the nearest jobs, and the almost total lack of public transportation, often places such people in a "Catch 22" situation. If they had a reliable car, they could travel to areas where jobs exist; but they can't afford a car, so they remain dependent on public assistance.

The Graying of America

The "graying of America" is by now a familiar phrase as the baby boom generation approaches its golden years. The fastest growing component of the population in the United States is the elderly, with the very old being the fastest growing subset.

As this demographic "bow wave" ripples through America over the next 20 years, how and whether our nation's transportation systems and services adjust will have important implications for the elderly themselves and for public and private service agencies and institutions who are concerned with the health, nutrition, and social needs of the elderly.

Most elderly people drive, and more than 75 percent live in auto-oriented suburbs or non-metropolitan areas where the automobile is generally a necessity, not an option. According to the New York Times,(9) more older people are living in the suburbs than ever before, and "for an increasing number of the suburban elderly, driving to supermarkets, libraries and shops, once a routine of daily life, is now simply impossible." According to Sandra Rosenbloom,(10)

"A National Academy of Sciences Committee concluded that it is crucial to better design the roadway system to accommodate a growing number of older drivers. However, it is equally important to consider the entire environment in which the elderly operate. Even with a perfect roadway system, people will probably have to stop driving before they stop wanting to get out and about. Therefore, we also have to give consideration to alternative transportation modes-as well as alternative ways of delivering goods and services directly to the elderly who can no longer drive."

In short, transportation is one of the greatest problems confronting old people. It affects their ability to eat, to get medical treatment, to work, and to socialize. In general, then, the limitations of our transportation system will impose special burdens not only on the
aging U.S. population, but also on their families and on social service and health-care institutions on which many elderly citizens depend.

Issue #1: Safety and Security

Because alternative transportation is often not available, some elderly people continue to drive in spite of diminished physical or mental capacities. This can pose a serious safety hazard to the drivers themselves, their passengers, and to other motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. Further, even when there is transit available, many elderly people are afraid for their safety during the walk to or ride on the transit system.

Issue #2: Isolation of the Elderly

According to the national Personal Transportation Survey (NPTS), there exist "pockets of much older women living alone, who cannot or will not drive, and who cannot or will not obtain rides from others. They are, in effect, cut off from most of society, and in their declining years face a significantly deteriorated, and possibly less healthy, quality of life. Similarly, the NPTS found pockets of men and women living below poverty level whose access to social and cultural activities and to medical services is extremely limited. Elderly persons who live in rural areas-a declining percentage of the total but with pockets of concentration-face extreme isolation if transportation alternatives are absent. Finally, as noted above, older people living in sprawling suburbs originally designed for growing families are effectively trapped. One 77 year old suburban New York widow put it this way: "I can't drive anymore, and I can't walk far, so I can't get anywhere on my own."(12)

Issue #3: Access to Employment

Richard Horkenson (13) writes that raising the retirement age a full five years for both men and women is "going to be an increasingly common phenomenon across all developed countries. The only way you make publicly-funded old age retirement systems compatible with rapidly aging populations is to push the retirement age up. What we will have to see happen sometime in this decade is that the public age of retirement goes to a minimum of 70 very quickly - to be effective very early in the twenty-first century." As working becomes a necessity rather than an option for more and more elderly people, the lack of alternatives to driving, in addition to the safety problem noted above, becomes one of economic survival.

Issue #4: Health Care Delivery

To the extent that transportation options are limited or non-existent, elderly persons will have constrained access to medical and health care services. If they can't get to the services, the services will have to get to them. This has implications for the well-being of the elderly themselves, and it will also put additional strains on the financial resources of health-care providers.
Travel by Women

Since World War II, America has experienced profound demographic, economic, and social change, and data suggest that many of these changes have differentially affected the travel needs and patterns of women and their children.

- Most women now live and/or work in low density communities.
- The majority of married women, women with children, and even women with very young children are now in the labor force.
- Roughly two-thirds of the new entrants to the national labor force in the last 20 years have been women.
- The number of families headed by a woman alone has increased substantially, and many such families—including some with a working parent—live in poverty.

Women's travel patterns have changed in response to these developments. During the same period, the largest increases in auto use and decreases in transit use have been by working women. From 1969 to 1990, miles driven by women overall increased by 76 percent (compared to 46 percent for men), and miles driven by women ages 16 to 34 (i.e., those entering the labor force) increased by more than 100 percent. In addition, women's share of transit use dropped twice as fast as men's.

The mode choice and travel patterns of women vary with different combinations of demographic characteristics, i.e., whether they are married or single; have children, and, if so, the age(s) thereof; are in the work force; live in poverty; live in urban or rural areas. It is difficult to make cross-cutting generalizations about the impact on women and their families of our nation's transportation systems and metropolitan development patterns. However, according to Sandra Rosenbloom, (14)

"The most salient fact today is that most women, and most women with children, are in the labor force, generally retaining substantial child care and domestic obligations in addition to their jobs. At the same time, a growing number have also assumed duties for aging parents and in-laws. These compound responsibilities have important transportation implications: they create the need for multiple trips in addition to any work trips, they create the incentive to link trips, and they reduce the ability to use alternative modes, like transit, which are inflexible and time consuming. All of these needs are intensified by the low density suburban development of jobs and homes."

Rosenbloom observes that,
"... women are more likely to work very close to home whatever their income, to link their commute with trips to school or child care centers or shopping, and, most importantly, to drive whatever their income."
A study of four Chicago suburbs,(15) suggests that women may make twice as many as 100 percent more trips as their male counterparts for errands, shopping, and chauffeuring children. It is tempting to conclude that the car is the first and best choice in America for women trying to balance job and family responsibilities. In the near term that may be true, given the low density, suburban, and single-use development patterns that exist today.

But the car is a "choice" only in a narrow sense of the word, since practical alternatives are rarely available. The ISTEA renews the challenge of making the transportation/land use connection. Mixed-use, higher density, "transit friendly" developments offer the possibility of a future where women—and, for that matter, men—need no longer rely solely on the car to conduct their personal, and family, business.

Issue #1: Clean Air Transportation Control Measures

The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, which are reinforced in the ISTEA, are resulting in a diverse array of strategies to reduce travel in single occupant automobiles in areas that do not meet federal air quality standards. The census data suggest that women's travel patterns differ from men's because they are balancing work and home obligations in ways that men do not. If this is so, transportation control measures (TCMs), which are being developed by transportation and air quality agencies, may have disproportionate impact on women, especially working mothers, who may not be able, or may be extremely unwilling, to change their travel patterns or reduce their reliance on the car in response to parking regulation, road pricing schemes, or tax disincentives.

Issue #2: Women's Travel Needs vs. Family Travel Needs

When there are children present in the family, women's travel patterns and needs are in part determined by the needs of their children. To the extent that this is so, women's travel needs might be better thought of as family travel needs. To date, most analyses do not suggest that men have made substantial adjustments in their travel patterns as they assume a larger role in their children's lives. It would be helpful to understand this intra-family dynamic and to see if changes are possible that would lighten the domestic and child care burdens, which appear to make women especially dependent on the single occupant auto.

Issue #3: Working Women with Eldercare

According to Rosenbloom,16 "The evidence is overwhelming that women -both daughters and daughters-in-law-provide the overwhelming percentage of the care given to older people living in the community, whether or not they are in salaried employment." Working women who have to care for elderly relatives must deal with a "double whammy" of a transportation system that offers limited mode choice to them and few, if any, mobility options for the elderly. Rosenbloom17 goes on to say that, "The census found that, in 1988, 15 percent of working women said that the main reason that they chose their work schedule was to arrange better child care for their children while an
an additional six percent said that they did so to arrange for the care of other members of their family." These women are "sandwiched" between their needs to care for both their parents and their children.

Issue #4: Women with Low Incomes

The working poor in general, but women in particular, who make less than a poverty wage are often traveling further and/or more often than people with higher incomes. Further, they are tending to use a mode, i.e., the automobile, which requires a relatively higher proportion of their limited disposable income. Poor working men must deal with larger than average spatial separation of residences and job markets, but poor working women often carry the added burden of child and/or elder care. Though data are scarce, logic suggests that there are significant financial, physical, and emotional burdens inherent in this situation.

On the Cutting Edge

Across the nation, transportation planning agencies, citizen activists, elected officials, and transportation service providers are already working to realize the vision of the ISTEA. The following are but a few examples:

In Washington, D.C., the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) is a coalition of over 150 groups founded in 1990 to ensure that transportation policy and investments help conserve energy, protect environmental and aesthetic quality, strengthen the economy, promote social equity, and make communities more livable. STPP emphasizes the needs of people, rather than vehicles, in assuring access to jobs, services and recreational opportunities. The work of STPP is made possible by grants from the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the Energy Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the James C. Penney Foundation, and the Surdna Foundation, Inc.

For more information, contact:

Hank Dittmar, Executive Director;
Laura Olsen, Grass Roots Coordinator; or
Chris Bender, Mobility Partners Program,
STPP, 202-939-3470.
In Chicago, the Center for Neighborhood Technology and the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group formed a coalition to protest the closing of a rapid transit line on the City's west side. After convincing the Chicago Transit Authority to rehabilitate the Green Line, the coalition engaged an architect to master plan six station sites for mixed use, pedestrian-oriented development. The project won ISTEA Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Program funding.

For more information, contact:
Jacky Grimshaw, CNT, 312-278-4800 or
Howard Greenwich, NCBG, 312-939-7198.

For more information, contact:
Henry Holmes at the Urban Habitat Program, 415-788-3666.

In St. Louis, The Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis has assisted a suburban theme park in hiring and transporting as many as 300 young people from lower income neighborhoods on the north side of St. Louis. The Urban League staff has concluded that lack of transportation may be more significant than lack of skills in chronic urban unemployment. To link urban public housing residents with suburban jobs, the Near Southside Employment Coalition transported as many as 60 workers to restaurant or maintenance jobs along the suburban growth corridor. A decline in private donations forced the Coalition to end this service in 1990. Transportation is a common obstacle in public sector programs that provide employment and job training for youth. Scott Air Force Base, the largest military facility in the St. Louis region, has provided positions for urban youth for the past five summers. To overcome the transportation problem, the Scott Air Force Base African-American Association, a voluntary group of military and civilian personnel, has funded private bus service for as many as 75 youth each summer. Fundraising problems have made the future of this program uncertain.

For more information, contact:
Blair Forlaw, East-West Gateway Coordinating Council, 314-421-4220.

In Columbia, Missouri, OATS is the largest rural transportation service provider in the country, serving primarily elderly and handicapped persons throughout much of rural Missouri. OATS relies on specially designed services to serve the needs of their customers, operating a mixture of fixed-route and on-demand services. OATS succeeds in its mission by relying principally on local support.

For more information, contact:
Linda Yeager, OATS, 314-443-4516.

In Atlanta, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), the metropolitan planning organization for the Atlanta region, is taking an aggressive approach to developing a transportation system that serves the needs of the elderly. ARC is also consciously
In Minneapolis - St. Paul, the McKnight Foundation established the Single Parent Loan Fund in 1984 to provide no-interest loans to low-income single parents in the Twin Cities area who are caring for their children while they pursue an education and/or paid employment. In 1991 the program was expanded to include two-parent families. Ninety-eight percent of the recipients of loans have been working poor women. A majority of single parents in the program need cash to purchase a car, to finance repairs, or to pay car insurance. Program recipients may borrow up to $1,500 to purchase a car.

For more information, contact:
Jocelyn Ancheta, the McKnight Foundation, 612-333-4220.

In Philadelphia, the regional public transit agency (SEPTA) formed a partnership with employers to provide service from existing transit stops to employment sites. Known as the SEPTA Series 200 Routes, SEPTA provides the equipment and expertise to run the service, and employers agreed to subsidize the cost of the service.

For more information, contact:

For more information on other "reverse-commute" efforts, contact: Mark Alan Hughes, c/o the Urban Poverty Program, the Ford Foundation, 212-573-4719.

In Oakland, California, the Spanish Speaking Unity Council's Fruitvale Transit Village seeks to use the BART station in this Latino neighborhood as the focus for medical services, employment, child care, shopping, and housing. The project has received both planning and implementation from ISTEA.

For more information, contact:
Rich Bell at the Spanish Speaking Unity Council, 515-534-7764, or Ellen Griffin at the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, 510-464-7700.

In Delaware, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission has contracted with the Pennsylvania Environmental Council to develop a van and car pool program. It will include a guaranteed ride home (GRH) feature, which is important for people with children or who may have to respond to other obligations on short notice. The plan provides for peace of mind since ridesharers know that they can get home quickly in the event of an emergency.
For more information, contact:

In Los Angeles County, projects such as child care centers located at transit stations provide an opportunity to combine trips and to use public transit.

For more information, contact:
Cynthia Pansing, Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 213-244-6447.

In Pasadena, California, the Holly Street Village Apartments project combines a rail transit station, moderate and low-income housing, and retail and commercial development. Residents will have the option to take transit or walk to jobs, shopping, and child care and other family services.

For more information, contact:
Cynthia Kurtz, Pasadena Department of Public Works, 818-405-4233.

In several states, broad-based coalitions have been formed to deal with multiple quality of life issues. In Georgia, the Georgia Transportation Alliance includes groups ranging from public utilities to environmental activists. In Pittsburgh, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Transportation Partnership has forged new alliances among citizens, business leaders, and public officials. In Alaska, the Alaska Citizens Transportation Coalition represents 25 organizations including the League of Women Voters, Native American Associations, and governmental and environmental representatives. In Portland, Maine, a public-private committee has created the state's most comprehensive and ambitious transportation plan to date.

For more information, contact:
Chris Bender, Surface Transportation Policy Project, 202-939-3470.

End Notes


2 Ibid.

3 Total disbursements by federal, state, and local governments.

4 Paul A. Jargowsky and Mary Jo Bane, "Neighborhood Poverty: Basic Questions," in Inner-City Poverty in America, Lynn and McGeary (Eds), national Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1990. The authors define concentrated poverty as the proportion of poor persons living in extremely poor neighborhoods, and they define extremely poor neighborhoods as census tracts in which at least 40 percent of the residents are below the poverty line.
5 Mark Alan Hughes with Julie E. Sternberg, the New Metropolitan Reality: Where the Rubber Meets the Road in Antipoverty Policy. Public Finance and Housing Center, the Urban Institute, 1992.

6 Hughes. Ibid., p.22.

7 Hughes. Ibid., p.24.


10 Sandra Rosenbloom, PhD., "Travel by the Elderly", 1990 national Personal Transportation Survey, Demographic Special Reports (Draft), April, 1994, p.171.

11 Sandra Rosenbloom, Ibid., p.171.

12 Fein, op.cit.


16 Rosenbloom, op.cit., p.88.

17 Rosenbloom, op.cit.

The Surface Transportation Policy Project is a nationwide network of more than 800 organizations, including planners, community development organizations, and advocacy groups, devoted to improving the nations transportation system.