

Summary and Highlights



New light rail vehicles operate test runs on the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's Green Line

- . Boston's rapid transit system is one of the oldest and most extensive in the country. Because of its age and pattern of piecemeal growth through evolutionary stages, the Boston transit system incorporates a melange of technologies: rapid transit, streetcar trolley, trackless trolley, commuter rail, and bus. In addition, tunnels and vehicles in the four subway lines have different dimensions and operating characteristics. These physical features constrain the operating efficiency of the total system.
- Boston's transit work force is among the highest paid in the country, with a minimum annual salary for unionized workers totaling \$14,000. The transit unions, which have strong supporters in the State legislature, have been successful in negotiating favorable contract agreements.
- Unlike recent highway and airport controversies—both of which have aroused vigorous and polarized debate throughout the Boston area—proposals for expansion and improvement of the transit and commuter rail system have not engendered significant organized opposition on basic ideological grounds. The consensus in favor of transit has been both an asset and a liability. On the one hand, opposition to increased capital investment in transit has been minimal. On the other hand, proposed transit projects and new approaches to the delivery of transit services have not received the same degree of critical analysis and evaluation as have other modes.
- . The Boston Transportation Planning Review (BTPR) changed the Boston area transportation planning process by

creating an open and participatory framework for decisionmaking that has been institutionalized by creation of the Joint Regional Transportation Committee (JRTC), a policy advisory body, and the Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS), the technical equivalent of the BTPR study team.

- The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), Boston's transit operating authority, was a reluctant participant in the BTPR process. MBTA resisted any fundamental reexamination or revision of its past plans and priorities.
- The BTPR staff of consultants was oriented by training and experience to highway planning, its principal orientation, from a transportation planning viewpoint, was to resolve specific highway controversies that had arisen in subregional corridors, and to reach project-related decisions on those proposed highway facilities. While this orientation sharpened the focus of the BTPR effort, it also tended to work against the emergence of a regionwide transportation strategy and the development of new approaches to transit service.
- The BTPR rapid transit proposals are largely consistent with the pre-BTPR transit plans for suburban rapid transit

extensions. Although BTPR did investigate (and in some cases resulted in the adoption of) other types of transit services or facilities (e.g., preservation and improvement of commuter rail service, special mobility services for low-income and elderly groups, circumferential transit service), these services and facilities appear to remain lower in priority than rapid transit extensions, with the exception of the commuter rail improvement program.

- Despite the apparent consensus in favor of an aggressive transit expansion program that was reached following the BTPR, no Federal approvals have been granted and no construction has been initiated on new transit projects during the post-BTPR period (since January 1973). State and Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority officials have complained about changing and ambiguous environmental review requirements. In addition, in recent project hearings in the South Quincy area, considerable local opposition has been voiced to the proposed Red Line extension project. This opposition indicates that specific project-related decisions may raise troublesome problems despite the region's overall protransit consensus.