

# Assessment of the Planning and Decisionmaking Process

## INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The institutional context for transportation policymaking, planning, and implementation in the Los Angeles metropolitan area is highly complex. Although the role of the regional planning agency has been strengthened during the past decade, a single authoritative mechanism for negotiating agreements among the public agencies concerned with mass transit within the county has not yet been clearly defined. Policymaking and implementation functions are fragmented, and decisionmaking is characterized by competition rather than coordination among the participating institutions. Within the region it is extremely difficult to formulate responsive policy and plans that rest firmly on an areawide consensus.

### Forum for Decisionmaking

The institutional forum for decisionmaking in Los Angeles is not well integrated. Although the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) provides the official forum for regional policymaking, it does not have sufficient authority to establish and enforce priorities for transportation development programs in the region. One result of this is that, until recently, a subregional transit operator like the Southern California Rapid Transit District (SCRTD) has operated with a considerable amount of autonomy. Fashioning an institutional mechanism that could forge effective and responsive countywide transit policy and plans has become a prime concern of regional decisionmakers.

Since SCAG was established 10 years ago, its ability to influence and discipline the planning process has increased. Both the Federal Government and the State have taken steps to provide SCAG with the leverage to coordinate the regional transportation planning process. Federal designations have made SCAG the 3-C agency for the region, given it the A-95 review power, and, more recently, have made it the Metropolitan

Planning Organization. While SCRTD'S rapid transit plan was being prepared, UMTA exerted external pressure to integrate the planning with SCAG'S work on the regional transportation plan.

The State of California also vested new authority in SCAG that has increased its influence in the region. Under the provisions of Assembly Bill 69, SCAG is responsible for developing the region's transportation plan, and as the designated administrator of SB 325 local transportation funds for the region, SCAG must evaluate and approve claims for this assistance from local transit operators.

Despite SCAG'S growing influence, it has not exerted direct control over the activities of the Southern California Rapid Transit District. Some of the reasons for this are rooted in the institutional character of SCAG itself, while others can be traced to characteristics of the SCRTD.

Although SCAG does provide a context for debate and negotiations about regional issues, it does not function as the authoritative forum for regional decisionmaking. The primary reason for this is that it does not have statutory powers to establish and enforce a set of program priorities, and it is not empowered to implement programs. Although SCAG'S Regional Development Guide Program and Regional Transportation Plan can set the framework for the evaluation and discussion of regional land-use and transportation issues, neither one is imbued with the force of law. County and municipal government still exercise control over the use of land, and the ultimate authority for transportation programs lies with the modal agencies that have the power to implement those programs.

Another reason SCAG has not provided an effective forum for transit decisionmaking is that its perspective is too broad. The size of the six-county area SCAG covers is so large that the organization's ability to concentrate resources on any one area is weakened by the demands of other areas. In effect, SCAG'S authority is too diffuse to

be applied effectively. In contrast, SCRTD is considerably more powerful.

SCRTD was created in 1964 for the specific purpose of developing a transit system in Los Angeles County. Its legislative mandate gives it full statutory powers to operate the existing bus transit system and to plan, design, construct, and operate a new mass transit system for the county. Though dependent on voter approval for financing the development of a new system, SCRTD could function with virtual autonomy once such approval or an alternative independent source of finance is obtained.

Historically, SCRTD has held a very clear idea of the objectives of its mission and has pursued them steadfastly. As the record of the years from 1968 to the present shows, SCRTD regards its top priority as providing Los Angeles County with a fixed-guideway rapid transit system. Despite growing concern over the suitability and costs of such a system, SCRTD has remained committed to this view of its mission; modifying its short-term programs where necessary, and negotiating the extent of the guideway system to gain political support, it has never lost sight of the fundamental concept of its legislative mandate.

In some instances, SCRTD has pursued its mission without coordinating its activities with other regional agencies. In 1968, the **Regional Plan Association criticized SCRTD for its failure to coordinate with other regional agencies, and throughout the period of planning that led up to the referendum in November 1974, UMTA repeatedly urged SCRTD to coordinate with SCAG and the Orange County Transit District (OCTD). Finally, in March 1974, CALTRANS' evaluation of the transit planning activities being carried out by SCRTD and OCTD underscored the lack of coordination between the system being developed by SCRTD and the plans OCTD was preparing.**

Like SCAG, other institutional participants in the decisionmaking forum have competed with SCRTD for policymaking and priority-setting powers. Aside from being represented on the SCRTD board, the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles also participate in the Technical Advisory Committee that was established to review SCRTD'S rapid transit plans. Although the city exerted some influence over SCRTD'S immediate action programs, SCRTD responded to a broader countywide constituency

when the board approved the 145-mile system that went to the voters in 1974. The county has tended to regard SCRTD functions as ones that it should exercise itself.

The County of Los Angeles is a powerful actor on the scene. It has played a key role in the process and is a source of competition for SCRTD, County control over revenue sharing funds puts it in a key position to vote to use those funds to subsidize SCRTD'S 25-cent fare. This move pushed SCRTD toward giving a more serious look at bus transit alternatives. In addition, county supervisors have promoted the idea of using existing railroad lines for commuter service. With considerable experience in designing and maintaining the vast county highway network, the county has always felt it was the logical candidate to run the area's transit system.

Since the referendum in November 1974, the attempts that have been made to get a new "starter" line approved have not fundamentally altered the institutional forum for decisionmaking. The Rapid Transit Advisory Committee which SCRTD established in March 1975 was designed to formulate a consensus on a broad corridor for a starter line and as such it represents a positive change in the style of local transit decisionmaking. Representatives from the City of Los Angeles, Orange and Los Angeles counties, SCAG, CALTRANS, and the League of California Cities, as well as SCRTD, all sit on the Rapid Transit Advisory Committee (RTAC). Collectively they are charged with exploring alternative corridors and reaching a common agreement on a starter line in order to demonstrate to UMTA their willingness to provide local support for its construction. By July 1975 the members of the board of directors of SCRTD, the city, other members of RTAC, and the State Senate and Assembly had reached a consensus on a starter line corridor running from the San Fernando Valley, through the central business district, and south to the Long Beach-San Pedro area. Local financing for such a corridor would come from State funds provided by Proposition 5.

The institutional approach offered by the Rapid Transit Advisory Committee does not represent a permanent solution to the institutional issues posed in the area. RTAC is an ad hoc response to an immediate problem. The committee's authority is derived from a collectively perceived need for action but does not extend to a long-term arrangement for establishing policy and program priorities.

At this point no clear long-term restructuring of the institutional forum is in evidence. Like the special purpose agencies that dominate the transit field in San Francisco (BARTD) and Denver (RTD), SCRTD has guarded its autonomy jealously and has resisted attempts to create a broader-based organization.

One legislative initiative has been taken that may represent a new departure. Under a proposed bill, Assembly Bill 1246, **the primary forum for decisionmaking for transportation within Los Angeles County would be a new Los Angeles County Transportation Commission. Although SCAG would retain responsibility for long-range regional transportation planning and coordination, the new commission would have specific countywide responsibilities for transit policymaking, priority setting, service coordination, short-range transportation planning, and approval of a new public mass transit system. SCRTD'S function would be entirely restricted to operating transit service.**

The future of this proposal is not clear at this time, and other alternatives have been suggested—such as the idea that the County Board of Supervisors should assume responsibility for rapid transit.

All these suggestions illustrate a central point—that the official forum provided for decisionmaking in Los Angeles is too weak to contain and direct the actions of the autonomous SCRTD. The region needs a more clearly delineated structuring of responsibilities for policymaking and transit operations in order to achieve a responsive and accountable planning process. As things stand now, conflicts between decisionmakers can be resolved only in an ad hoc manner that depends heavily on the relative distribution of power and public favor among the participants in the process. Should the State of California begin to play an even more active role in Southern California transit affairs, it might provide the outside “third party” required to structure an effective forum for conflict resolution and transit decisionmaking.

### **Accountability of Decisionmakers**

The Southern California Rapid Transit District (SCRTD) brings into focus the issue of accountability inherent in a special purpose transit district. Although SCRTD'S legislative mandate gave the

agency clear authority to develop a mass transit system, SCRTD has been unable to produce a flexible and financially feasible plan that responds to the varied demands of the several constituencies within Los Angeles County.

The problem can be traced to several interrelated factors. But one primary reason is that SCRTD'S board and staff held to such a strict interpretation of their mandate that they were caught in the untenable position of trying to apply the same technological solution to the needs of both the City of Los Angeles and the outlying suburban jurisdictions. The cost of such a single-minded vision ultimately made it impractical and led to its defeat.

SCRTD'S legislative mandate charged the agency with designing, implementing, and operating a mass transit system for the county. As we have seen, the legislation required SCRTD to seek voter approval for financing the development of such a system.

From the outset, SCRTD'S board and staff committed themselves to developing a fixed-guideway system that would provide service to the county. Pressure from UMTA and the demand for immediate transit improvements led SCRTD to formulate short-term bus transit service solutions. But SCRTD did not waver from its basic commitment to plan a regional rapid rail system. Most people expected the plan to resemble the BART system in San Francisco. It was this type of technological solution that SCRTD asked the voters to approve in November.

By trying to apply this system to the entire region, SCRTD was caught in a situation in which it could satisfy neither its own mandate nor the demands of the several jurisdictions of the region. Providing the jurisdictions beyond the central city of Los Angeles with the same rapid rail technology as the one applied to the city resulted in a system so costly that the voters of the county were unwilling to approve the mechanism for financing their share of the cost, and UMTA also was extremely reluctant to commit itself to the Federal share.

The reasons why SCRTD persisted on its course bear on the issues of accountability and responsiveness. Aside from the constraining imperatives of its own legal mandate, SCRTD also stuck to the course for a number of other reasons.

**The composition of SCRTD'S appointed board lessened its ability to respond to the complexities of the region. Although the City of Los Angeles is the**

jurisdiction most interested in mass transit, it is underrepresented on the board. The mayor of Los Angeles appoints only two of the members, while the County Board of Supervisors appoints five and the City Selection Committee appoints four.

As Mayor Bradley pointed out in his testimony of December 13, 1974, before the Subcommittee on Los Angeles Regional Transportation of the State Assembly Committee on Transportation, the composition of the board made SCRTD beholden to areas whose demands for equal treatment were most likely to lead to an overly extensive rapid transit system.

One reason SCRTD was caught in this vicious circle has to do with the method of financing the system. Having chosen to develop a large regional system financed in part by an increment of the sales tax, SCRTD needed to get voter approval for increasing the tax. In order to secure the support of local officials in outlying areas for the tax increase, SCRTD had to provide them with the modern service it provided to the City of Los Angeles, and doing so required extending the system beyond its justifiable limits.

The irony of this situation is that if SCRTD has been able to take a flexible, incremental approach to building a system, it might have succeeded. The record suggests that a less extensive rail rapid transit system serving the central city combined with relatively short-range express bus and local circulation improvements would have been more responsive to the requirements of the county. Both the technical justification for a rapid rail system and its primary voter support were strong in the City of Los Angeles, while the technical rationale for providing such a system to outlying suburban jurisdictions was much weaker. Suburban jurisdictions were only lukewarm about financing a system that would take such a long time to construct and provide them with service.

Had SCRTD been able to produce a flexible plan that provided the dense central city with a line and outlying areas with express bus services and innovative local transit services, the outcome of the referendum might have been different. As it was, the attempt to serve the suburban areas with the same technological solution as the center city in the end penalized the people most willing to support mass transit.

As SCRTD'S current efforts indicate, a far more realistic plan could have been developed if the

district had had a stable and assured source of funding that was not subject to the vagaries of political horsetrading. By using Proposition A funds, SCRTD can put up a local share for a usable segment of a transit system to provide service to an area that has clearly expressed its support for it.

There is a potential drawback to a financing mechanism that is not dependent on voter approval. To a great extent, the referendum vote is the voter's best recourse for holding appointed officials accountable for their actions. An independent source of funding could conceivably be used by an agency in a manner which rode roughshod over the wishes of the public. This is one of the problems posed by trust fund financing for special purposes.

In the case of SCRTD, however, the use of Proposition 5 funds is not without constraints. Other jurisdictions would be contributing to a starter line, and the State legislature and the State Transportation Board are both bodies to which SCRTD can be held accountable.

One other measure of the degree of responsiveness of SCRTD should be mentioned before closing this discussion. Whether justifiably or not, the autonomous character of SCRTD was regarded with considerable wariness prior to the November 1974 referendum. In an evaluation of the Rapid Transit "Building Block Plan" issued in May 1974, the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Rapid Transit (CACORT) specifically recommended taking measures prior to the November referendum to assure that strong controls would be placed on the manner in which any money approved by that referendum was spent.<sup>13</sup>

In another move to ensure that local jurisdictions would have control over SCRTD'S activities, the State Assembly passed HB 3896. **Originally proposed by Assemblyman Lanterman of Pasadena, the bill prohibited the expenditure of SCRTD funds from the 1/2-cent sales tax for purposes other than planning and design, such as capital development, unless approved by the affected local jurisdictions.** Had the referendum succeeded, the bill would have given local municipalities strong leverage over SCRTD'S capital expenditures for mass transit.

In summary, the mandate of SCRTD and the structure of its board seriously reduced its ability to

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<sup>13</sup> CACORT, *Public Transportation: The Citizen Overview*, May 1974, p. 22.

fashion a plan that could respond to the complex requirements of such a varied area as the County of Los Angeles. The new effort to secure approval for a starter line responds more directly to a commonly felt need.

### Public Involvement

The Southern California Rapid Transit District did not establish a formal and permanent structure for community participation in the planning process that led to the 1974 referendum. Following the precedent set during the 1968 campaign, the SCRTD and local transit supporters carried out a widespread public relations campaign designed to sell the idea to the voters, but their "sales pitch" was not a substitute for a truly responsive citizen participation program. The ill-fated 1974 plan might have fared better if those potentially affected elements of the public had been involved from the beginning of the process.

Public participation in SCRTD'S planning process occurred in a number of ways. The primary approach employed by SCRTD was to conduct community meetings and presentations during different stages of the process. By its own count, SCRTD held 10 meetings during Phase I, 18 in Phase II, and over 100 meetings during Phase III of the project. These meetings and conferences were followed by formal public hearings on the rapid transit proposal.

These meetings provided a forum for SCRTD to describe alternative proposals to the public and to receive comments from the public and local officials. During Phase III these criticisms were incorporated into the evaluation of alternatives and contributed to the formulation of a more extensive short-term bus improvement program.

This type of approach has a number of drawbacks. First, it does not involve a formal period of public involvement in the setting of goals and objectives for the process. Through participation in the early stages, the public and the planners can make their values, objectives, and concerns explicit. Second, because the approach is not formalized, laymen and technicians seldom have enough time to learn each other's language and begin discussing the issues that concern local neighborhood groups. This is particularly true with systems-level planning where the technicians are dealing with regional issues that are not immediately comprehensible to locally oriented groups. For these

reasons, public meetings tend to offer little more than a one-way process of providing the public with information.

A more formal approach to public involvement was initiated by Mayor Bradley in early 1974 when he established the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Rapid Transit. CACORT had two primary objectives. One was to review and comment on SCRTD'S plans, and the second was to conduct voter education and public information programs for the campaign for the November referendum. The committee was made up of civic leaders, business organizations, labor officials, and environmental groups.

Although CACORT did a commendable job on both counts, it suffered from a number of weaknesses. It was not institutionally integrated into the SCRTD process. It had difficulty getting information from SCRTD and, as CACORT was evaluating the SCRTD'S March 1974 plan, SCRTD was already considering the proposals that it later adopted in July. CACORT'S evaluation comments and recommendations were answered on July 12, 1974, after the transit plan had been adopted.

CACORT'S dual role not only created considerable friction within the organization itself but made it difficult for members to discuss publicly their criticisms of the district's plan. Although a separate committee structure was established for the campaign, it was identified closely enough with CACORT to dampen the criticisms of all but those members of CACORT who were vehemently critical of SCRTD.

Aside from the participation of the Los Angeles County voters in the referendum itself, SCRTD had no other mechanisms for public participation. According to one observer, the district has not yet established any mechanism for the public to provide input to the starter line project. Without a serious effort to structure and regularize participation at regional, corridor, and neighborhood levels, SCRTD may find itself in the very same position as the highway engineers whose projects have been stopped by community opposition.

### TECHNICAL PLANNING PROCESS

The long process of technical planning leading to the proposal presented to voters in November 1974 was governed from the outset of SC RTD'S

adherence to its legislative mandate to build a comprehensive mass rapid transit system for Los Angeles County. Historically, SCRTD has interpreted that mandate to mean that the district was charged with developing a rapid rail transit system for the area, and it was that specific definition of its mandate that shaped the overall character of the technical planning process. This fundamental commitment provided the underlying goal of the process, conditioned the manner in which alternative transit systems were developed and evaluated, and, finally, influenced the course of action the district chose to follow after the defeat of Proposition A.

In retrospect, one could argue that planning for rapid transit in Los Angeles has become more sophisticated during the past 5 years. Under pressure from UMTA and SCAG, SCRTD gradually expanded the process to include an examination of regional and local objectives, more analysis of alternative transit corridors and systems, and greater consideration of short-term transit improvements and ways of staging the implementation of the proposed system. By the time the board adopted the proposed plan in July 1974, SCRTD'S consultants had generated a considerable amount of information upon which to base a preliminary decision on an overall system of transit corridors.

But to say that the process was evolving in a positive direction does not mean it was an exemplary process. SCRTD did not pursue a step-by-step process of establishing clear goals and objectives, objectively exploring and evaluating a full range of alternatives for achieving those objectives, and formulating staged implementation programs that were coordinated with other regional development programs. SCRTD'S objective was predetermined from the beginning, and the modifications it made to the process as it pursued that objective were dictated by the exigencies of negotiating with other institutional and political actors in the region and responding to pressure from the Federal Government.

### Development of Goals and Objectives

SCRTD conducted the technical planning process that led to the proposal of July 1974 within the context of a set of comprehensive goals for regional development, transportation, and environmental improvement. Although these goals provided general guidelines for the conduct of the

study, the original development of alternative corridors responded primarily to SCRTD'S legislative mandate to build a regional rapid transit system.

Southern California Rapid Transit District's enabling legislation directed SCRTD to provide the Southern California area with a mass rapid transit system and stated:

There is an imperative need for a comprehensive mass rapid transit system in the Southern California area, and particularly in Los Angeles County. Diminution of congestion in streets and highways in Los Angeles will facilitate passage of all Californians motoring through the most populous area of this State and will especially benefit domiciliaries of that county who reside both within and without the rapid transit district.<sup>14</sup>

SCRTD has based all its major planning efforts on this fundamental legislative objective.

During the planning that led to the proposal adopted in July 1974, SCRTD developed a broad set of goals to guide the process. The goals and objectives were derived from a number of sources and provided the basis for the analysis of alternative corridors and modes that was carried out in the three main phases of the process. The general transportation goals that guided the Phase I effort were derived from the *Regional Development Guide* of the Southern California Association of Governments, the *Environmental Development Guide* of the County of Los Angeles, and the city's proposed citywide plan. In Phase II and Phase III of the process, these goals and objectives were elaborated upon in evaluating the selected alternative corridors.

The *Summary Technical Report* produced during the study of alternative transit corridors and systems and finally published in October 1974 contains a brief review of the regional goals and objectives set forth to guide the process. It cites the broad regional goals in SCAG'S *Regional Development Guide*:

- . To develop a transportation system which will support the comprehensive goals of the region, taking into account the effect of mode selection, location, and time upon the

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<sup>14</sup> As quoted in Southern California Rapid Transit District, *Transit for Los Angeles County: A Sub-Regional Transit Element of the Transportation Plan*, July 1974, p. i.

physical, social, economic, and organizational environment.

- To create a balanced transportation system integrated with planned land use in order to give effective mobility for all people and to provide efficient and economic movement of goods.
- Ž To minimize the need for long-distance intraregional travel, particularly work trips, by guiding the development of the region in a manner as to create self-sufficient communities which have a balance of service facilities, employment and housing.
- Ž To develop a transportation system for the region that will be compatible with the environment, use the available resources wisely, promote the esthetic beauty of the region, and not result in any undesirable environmental changes.
- To develop a transportation system that is financially, legally and politically feasible, has broad public support, and has a commitment to its implementation by elected officials and those providing transportation services.

SCRTD'S consultant team established a number of more specific objectives to guide its planning and evaluation activities. As described in the *Summary Technical Report*, these included: (a) mobility needs; (b) considerations involving transit service characteristics; (c) environmental objectives such as improved air quality and energy conservation; (d) effective coordination with land-use and development policies; (e) financial feasibility; and (f) consideration of promising new technologies.

In addition to the specific objectives falling within these categories, SCRTD also set forth a number of general considerations regarding the range of travel needs that planning had to address. These included the need for improved commuter-oriented transit service; the need to include a mix of local, community-oriented, and metropolitan travel services; the need for combinations of express services for longer trips requiring separate rights-of-way; the need to develop "community-responsive" services; and the need to improve mobility within major activity centers.

All these were regarded as important considerations for the planning process according to the

report. They provided the basis for developing more specific evaluation criteria which the consultants used to evaluate alternative corridors and systems.

While the statements of goals and objectives formulated by SCRTD were comprehensive in their coverage, critics of the SCRTD technical planning process have raised a number of points dealing with the specificity of the goal statements and the manner in which they were used in the process.

Although the goals and objectives covered a broad range of concerns, they were not stated in explicit enough terms to be useful in directing or guiding the development of specific alternatives. In its evaluation of the SCRTD planning process, CALTRANS concluded that the goals were very broad statements that did not always provide specific direction.<sup>15</sup> The citizens' group CACORT criticized SCRTD'S March 1974 plan on the same grounds. In its summary report, *Public Transportation; The Citizen's View* (May 1974), CACORT urged both SCAG and SCRTD to develop objectives that would be "sufficiently specific to permit judgment of the degree to which any system design contributes to these objectives."

The second major criticism of the process is that, initially, the alternatives were not developed to respond to the project's goals and objectives. CALTRANS' evaluation commented directly on this by stating that ". . . the goals apparently were not used in the original development of the transportation alternatives." And UMTA'S controversy with SCRTD sprang directly from UMTA'S perception that SCRTD'S approach was to develop a master plan for transit based on those corridors most likely to support a regional rapid rail system.

Judging from the Phase I and Phase II reports, the contention that the system developed was based on rapid rail transit technology appears to be justified. This seems to be the bias in both reports, and the corridors that seemed least susceptible to a rail system were ranked low by the consultants. The focus was on regional travel rather than the shorter, community-oriented travel upon which attention became focused later on in the process.

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<sup>15</sup> CALTRANS, *Evaluation— Transit System Proposals, Southern California Association of Governments, and Orange County Transit District, May 31, 1974, p. II-I.*



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The question of developing a plan that respondent to more localized community level needs came to the fore in Phase III in response to pressures from UMTA, SCAG, and the City of Los Angeles. A clear conflict existed between the regional rapid rail master plan concept repeatedly put forward by SCRTD and the goals of the citizens of the area as seen by these agencies. Aside from seeking to develop lower-cost transit alternatives, UMTA also saw the need for more immediate bus improvements to meet air-quality and energy-saving objectives.

SCAG, too, disagreed with SCRTD'S lack of interest in shorter-term proposals, since SCAG had formulated regional transportation goals which sought to reduce trip lengths. SCAG'S strategy was aimed at minimizing the need for travel in the region and improving circulation in major activity centers. SCAG also recommended a more gradual approach to improving the overall transit system by placing greater emphasis on incrementally building up transit patronage with more imaginative use of local and express bus services.

The City of Los Angeles generally agreed with both these positions but also favored providing rapid rail transit in a more limited number of the most heavily traveled corridors. One of Mayor Bradley's early objectives was to secure better circulation within the city's more transit-dependent communities, and he underlined the need for more immediate transit improvements.

All these varying objectives had been clearly enunciated by the time Phase III of the process got underway. Nevertheless, they were not able to dislodge SCRTD'S long-term commitment to a major rapid rail system. Although the July 1974 report contained a major program for immediate bus transit improvements, its basic long-term program was to develop a 145-mile system of fixed-guideway transit with express bus service as the first step toward a regional master plan of 240 miles of transit corridors.

Despite the Phase 111 summary report's explicit recognition of the objectives of providing more community-oriented services, only the first steps have been taken toward translating that recognition into action. **The end result of the work on the starter line** may be to develop a regional system which has a rapid rail "backbone" in the most heavily traveled corridors and an extensive network of community-level bus services, feeder lines, and express buses. But if such a system comes

about, it will be the outcome of a long process of debate, conflict, and negotiation over transit objectives, rather than the logical outgrowth of the goals and objectives that were originally established for the process.

### Development and Evaluation of Alternatives

The shortcomings of a planning process led by a special purpose transit district become most apparent in relation to the evaluation of alternatives. SCRTD'S legislative mandate to effect a mass transit system, reinforced by its commitment to a BART-like fixed-guideway system, made it uneasy with the task of evaluating a full range of alternative transportation modes.

During the debate prior to the **1968 referendum, several groups reacted against Proposition A because of shortcomings in the SCRTD plan** that stemmed from its failure to weigh alternatives to a fixed-guideway system. The high cost of the system SCRTD proposed was one such issue, related to the evaluation of alternatives in the sense that SCRTD'S commitment to very expensive fixed-guideway technology ensured that the system set before voters would be extremely expensive. Another argument, which focused on SCRTD'S commitment to BART-type technology, was that the transit district was committing Los Angeles to an inflexible technology, just when more advanced technologies were being developed that might better serve the region's needs. Finally, many of the people who balked at SCRTD'S fixed-guideway proposals would have been more comfortable with an alternative that offered a more immediate if short-term solution to the need for public transportation. Paradoxically SCRTD'S commitment to BART-type heavy rail technology may have been strengthened considerably by the distorted but common public perception of the time that rail transit technology was superior to cheaper modes of transportation.

Since **1972**, UMTA has been a force urging Los Angeles towards a more balanced weighing of alternative transportation modes. The results of Phase I evaluation of alternatives did not respond to UMTA'S interpretation of the work program. The SCRTD study team examined some 15 candidate transit corridors. Specialists on the team examined development policies and the existing and forecast distribution of population and employment; concentrations of transit-dependent groups; potential

transit patronage; and the **patterns of movement within the region. These analyses led to a ranking of corridors based on these different factors. A range of transit technologies were then identified and the most applicable—mass rapid transit (MRT), personal rapid transit (PRT), and busways—were selected and applied to the potential transit corridors.** The eight corridors and modes which SCRTD and the consultants selected for future study in Phase II did not include consideration of nonexclusive busway alternatives.

According to an UMTA representative, the reason such an alternative did not appear was that SCRTD'S general manager had told the consultants not to consider it in the study. When UMTA learned of the omission in early 1973, it exerted its influence at the annual Inter-Modal Planning Group meeting in Los Angeles to have SCRTD examine an all-bus alternative.

The results of that study appeared in the report entitled *Rapid Transit for Los Angeles—Summary Report of Consultants' Recommendations* (July 1973).

In UMTA'S estimation, the treatment of the all-bus alternative in the July 1973 report was cursory and biased. A review of the report supports this conclusion. The overly generalized way in which the alternative was defined made it much more costly and impractical than it would have been had an all-bus system been specifically tailored for the region.

The all-bus alternative was defined as a "saturation" bus service. It involved an extensive grid system covering the entire 2,000-square-mile service area on which buses would run at 5-minute headways at peak periods. A modification of this system involved a grid network covering selected areas only.

Having defined what critics considered to be an excessively large system in the first place, SCRTD concluded that the system would: (a) be much more

costly to finance; (b) attract more riders initially but cause greater congestion in high-density areas; (c) be attractive for short- and medium-distance travel only; and (d) require too great a subsidy. However, SCRTD felt that busways perhaps would be a useful component of a mixed transit system.

The treatment in the report contained no discussion of the types of all-bus facilities or service that were contemplated. Whether the buses were to run in mixed traffic, receive preferential treatment, or be used in various combinations seems to have been neglected entirely. Had these combinations and characteristics been discussed, a more exact evaluation of the alternatives could have been made.

The dispute between UMTA and SCRTD by no means abated after the July 1973 report. UMTA continued to press for a more objective analysis of bus transit options, a more detailed short-term bus program, and a means for reducing the increasingly large cost of the commitment the Federal Government would have to make to them. Although the July 1973 proposal did not represent a finished plan, its preliminary estimated cost, including an escalation allowance, was \$6.6 billion over a 12-year implementation period.

The alternatives that were developed in March 1974 responded to many of these concerns, though a full-fledged bus alternative was not presented. As described in the historical narrative, the report prepared as part of the Phase III work in March contained a "building block" approach that offered different increments of development of a mass rapid transit system. Each of these increments also represented increasingly large local and Federal commitments of funds.

Between the development of the "Building Block Plan" in March 1974 and the SCRTD board's adoption of the technical planning process, the board appears to have moved closer to the political arena. Faced with studies indicating that only **60 miles of rapid transit could be definitely justified, while the difference between 60 and 120 miles was equally justifiable for fixed-guideway or bus, SCRTD opted for the more extensive 145-mile plan.**

Both CALTRANS and CACORT raised questions about the extent of the system that was finally recommended and about the evaluation process in general. CALTRANS' evaluation was that **120 miles of rapid transit was reasonable. But**

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- <sup>16</sup> ● Wilshire—MRT and special analysis of PRT  
● San Fernando—MRT  
● San Gabriel—MRT and busway  
● Airport-Southwest—MRT and busway  
● South-Central—MRT and busway  
● Santa Ana—MRT and busway  
● El Segundo Norwalk Freeway—MRT and busway  
● Northern "Extension of the Long Beach Freeway—busway

(SOURCE—*Phase I Progress Report*, March 1973, p. VI-8)

it argued that greater attention needed to be paid to a medium-capacity system before a high-capacity system was decided upon CALTRANS said that the design characteristics that the consultants had been required to base their assumptions on were excessively high. More evaluation was needed of a medium -capacity system capable of carrying 25,000 passengers per hour rather than one carrying 45,000 before SCRTD proceeded with preliminary engineering of the system.

The CACORT evaluation also raised a question that appeared in the CALTRANS study: SCRTD had not conducted a detail cost-effectiveness analysis of the chosen alternative. In the *Summary Technical Report* of Phase II published in October 1974, a general evaluation of the two all-bus concepts, and limited (less than 40 miles), moderate (60 and 80 miles), and large-scale (140 miles) fixed-guideway plus bus systems does appear. **But this report indicated that a moderate-priority bus system combined with limited (60 to 80 miles) fixed-guideway services probably was more cost-effective than an all-bus system.** Assuming that this information was available to SCRTD board members in July, it was clear by then that the choice between bus and rail was (in certain proportions) not an economic but a policy question. On the basis of policies favoring energy conservation or a nodal pattern of development, the report said that fixed-guideway up to 140 miles could be considered as attractive as using buses alone.

This review suggests that the process of developing alternatives flowed directly from the fundamental legislative goal that governed SCRTD'S activities. In addition, it is likely that the board's selection of the 145-mile system was influenced by the political necessity of providing high-quality service to as many voters as possible.

### Financing and Implementation

The proposal adopted by the SCRTD board on July 7, 1974, set forth an overall plan for a 240-mile arterial transit system and recommended the initial implementation of a 145-mile system at a current cost of \$4.2 billion. The manner in which such a plan would be implemented was a vital concern.

The primary source of funds for this system was UMTA. UMTA was expected to provide **80 percent of the capital cost with SCRTD providing the local share derived from the .5 percent sales tax and one-**

**half of its SB 325 funds (State highway-users funds). Local funds derived from the sales tax would only be committed with assurance of a two-to-one Federal match.**

SCRTD stated that the 145-mile system would be constructed as funds became available. Although the financial analysis described in the *Summary Technical Report* (October 1974) laid out the financing in terms of the "building block" approach, SCRTD went to the voters with the general impression that the additional 1/2-cent sales tax would produce the local share to get Federal funds to begin work on the entire system.

The need to secure local funding for the system through a public referendum put SCRTD'S planning process on an unstable basis. First of all, it was one of the factors that obliged SCRTD to make the system extensive enough to secure the support of enough voters to pass the referendum. Secondly, the dynamics of this process produced a system so extensive that the cost became too high for most voters to support. If a source of funding had been available to SCRTD that was stable and did not depend on direct voter approval, the district would have been in a much better position to begin the first increments of the "building block" approach laid out in its March report.

Ironically, the passage of Proposition 5 in June and the defeat of Proposition A in November appear to have led to a situation in which SCRTD is engaged in carrying out a staged implementation of a transit plan. The defeat of Proposition A killed the chances for approval of a large regional system, but the passage of Proposition 5 provided the steady funds required to develop a limited transit system incrementally.

One final observation should be made on the implementation plans prepared for the July 1974 plan. While the SCRTD study team concentrated a large share of its energy on exploring sources of capital funding, the team's analysis also included a review of projected maintenance and operating costs. This review indicated the rate of cost increase would necessitate a search for other Federal and local sources of assistance. Although the high projected costs apparently were due at least in part to the provisions for a 25-cent fare, SCRTD'S current projected use of UMTA Section 5 moneys suggests that mounting operating costs may be a major factor in reducing the number of new transit systems started in the Nation.