

Summary Case Assessment

The purpose of this final section is to summarize the assessment of the transit planning and decisionmaking process in the San Francisco Bay Area in terms of the guidelines for evaluation. This material is divided into three parts: (1) Institutional Context, (2) Technical Planning, and (3) the Financing and Implementation Program.

1. ASSESSMENT OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The San Francisco Bay Area has had an exceptionally fragmented political and institutional structure. Many obstacles have impeded regional cooperation despite the need for a regional strategy created by a highly interdependent regional economy and the great difficulty and cost of providing regional transportation facilities.

- **Forum for Decisionmaking.**—Until the recent creation of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) there has generally not been an effective forum for regional transit planning and decisionmaking, except during the period from 1954 to 1956 when the basic BART master plan was being formulated. The creation of MTC follows an interim period when typically weak planning agencies were established to satisfy minimum Federal requirements.
- **Accountability and Authority of Decisionmakers.**—Serious community relations and technical problems in implementing BART were caused, at least in part, by the lack of control the BARTD board exercised over the consultant team. To a large extent business interests prevailed over public interests at both board and staff levels. Perhaps belatedly, concern over BARTD's responsiveness led to instituting direct election of the board in November 1974. MTC, although its formal structure is similar to BARTD's original structure, has become one of the more effective and accountable regional forums

in the country, primarily because its responsibilities force it to make choices among competing interests.

- **Public Involvement.**—During the BART system planning process, public participation was seen almost entirely as an “educational” effort aimed at winning the bond election. During the implementation of the basic system, the lack of effective participatory mechanisms was partially responsible for increasing the level of confrontation between communities and BARTD. In contrast, the recent BART extension studies have sought public participation in an open planning process reflecting lessons learned as well as BARTD's need to regain popular support if any of the extensions are to be built.

MTC has made an intensive effort to involve the public in preparing a regional transportation plan through town meetings, frequent interaction with community groups, and good communications efforts.

2. ASSESSMENT OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

BART's technical planning process cannot be fairly judged by standards that have evolved rapidly over the last 20 years,

- **Goals and Objectives.**—Although the underlying motivations of various interests varied widely, a high degree of consensus developed during the 1945 to 1962 period that BART was the regional transportation goal. In the style of the times, no formal goal-setting process was engaged in nor do the reports deal with goals and objectives in the manner that has since become accepted planning practice. However, the transit planning team worked closely with local planners throughout the Bay Area in developing a regional land development plan that formed a primary

basis for the BART system plan, thus helping to assure that the transit plan reflected contemporary goals and objectives. Community goals and objectives played an increasingly less significant role during the financial squeeze of the mid-1960's but became major factors again during the recent extension studies.

- **Development and Evaluation of Alternatives.**—BART system planning did not evaluate alternative land development configurations for the Bay Area—this approach to regional planning did not become accepted practice until several years later in the 1960's. Likewise relatively little evaluation was made of alternative system configurations or technologies. Despite a requirement in the original legislation, no economic justification of the BART system was provided during the master planning process in 1954-56. The first analysis of benefits appeared in a 1961 report, but no benefit-cost assessment was performed, perhaps because it would not have resulted in an economic justification of the project. Alternative route alignment studies were performed in some corridors, but this work was limited.

3. ASSESSMENT OF THE FINANCING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

Lessons learned from BART have heavily influenced this study's overall conclusions regarding problems in financing and implementing rapid transit systems. BART is the only new transit system that has been completed and opened to service in recent decades. It, along with the Washington Metro system, illustrates well the dangers of a long-term commitment to an inflexible master plan.

- **Achievement of National, Regional, and Local Goals.**—Regional goals dominated over national, and local goals in the BART program—probably more so than will be permitted anywhere in the foreseeable future. A regional organization with a clear mandate to build a regional system was provided with guaranteed financing of a billion dollars. (The figure would be double that in today's terms). The tight construc-

tion schedule and budget combined with the inflexibility of the financial program and master plan to force an almost inevitable growing conflict with community land use objectives and changing values.

- **Stability and Predictability of Funding.**—The financing program did appear to provide this important requirement at the outset and therefore was able to give BARTD the momentum it desired. However, no mechanism was built into the program to provide for revisions to the financing plan to accommodate the almost inevitable design changes, delays, and cost escalation. For this reason, resolving the refinancing problems consumed over 3 years of time and much wasted effort and resources.
- **Long Range, Regional, Single-Technology Planning Versus Short-Term Responsiveness to Local Needs.**—BART demonstrates that financing arrangements should provide balance between local and regional transit needs and should avoid commitment to a single-technology regional system when different technologies may be more appropriate in different corridors. The conflict between regional and local needs was more sharply drawn in the San Francisco area because BARTD was formed as a separate organization to assume only regional transit responsibilities and was given a large share of the area's potential tax base.
- **Avoidance of Delays Due to Program Administration at Higher Levels.**—Since Federal involvement in BART's implementation was comparatively moderate and came late in the program, it was never a serious factor in causing delays, such as has been alleged in other metropolitan areas. At the State level BARTD reported experiencing considerable frustration in dealing with the Legislative Analyst's office while it performed reviews of BARTD. However, these reviews were a necessary and productive part of the legislative process; the delays that resulted could have been avoided and the BARTD program management probably substantially improved if there had been a well managed, continuing legislative review process from the beginning.