

Summary and Highlights



- Planning for the Metro regional transit system began 20 years ago. The main impetus for the first study was public concern about future congestion and growth.
- During the critical period in the early sixties, rapid rail was promoted as a way to mitigate congestion while keeping freeways out of Washington's parks and neighborhoods. Both highway and transit forces viewed Washington as a test case; confrontations between these two groups delayed Metro throughout its planning and construction.
- The technical work throughout the transit planning process in Washington was progressive and, in general, fair. Yet, the political overtones in the early 1960's debate cast doubt on the planners' objectivity.
- Thanks to a remarkable achievement in regional cooperation, the 98-mile Metro system is under construction. The District has petitioned to exchange most of the once controversial freeways for funds to continue Metro construction.
- Though public pressure has brought some changes in the adopted regional system, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) has had, in general, a defensive approach to public involvement. As Metro construction has progressed into residential areas and people have discovered that subways can disrupt neighborhoods in many of the same ways as highways, public criticism of Metro has increased.
- Coordination of Metro with other regional land use and transportation planning has been weak. Metro alignments were selected to conform to regional comprehensive planning, but station area development planning began late and continues with neither WMATA nor the Washington Metropolitan

Council of Governments (COG) providing coordination. COG's Transportation Planning Board, responsible for coordinating regional multimodal planning, does not assert its function effectively.

- Congress was the forum for early Metro decisions, including the important 1965 decision to build the 25-mile basic system. The promise of Federal financial support underlay and influenced Metro decision-making from the beginning.
- WMATA'S repeated underestimates of Metro's construction cost, in combination with rising deficits in Metrobus operations, have created a situation in which local governments and the Federal Government alike are wary of making the new financial commitments needed to complete the

system. The current Metro cost estimate is \$4.5 billion, a \$2 billion rise over the original projection of \$2.5 billion.

- WMATA is in an unusually difficult position with regard to funding because it persists in assuming that, in the long run, operating revenues will pay not only for operating costs but for a portion of the debt charges. Although this was a common assumption when it first appeared in Metro planning, it has been called into question by the ever-rising operating deficits of Metro's buses. This new economic situation has raised the possibility that local governments could be liable for the responsibility of paying Metro's debts, a situation which makes it politically difficult to elicit further funds for Metro. The fragility of a locally based funding structure for transit is as yet an unresolved issue.