

Summary Case Assessment

The purpose of this section is to summarize the nature of the transit planning and decisionmaking process in the Washington region in light of the guidelines listed in the approach to the assessment. The summary, therefore, is divided into two parts: (1) Assessment of the Institutional Context, and (2) Assessment of the Technical Planning Process.

1. ASSESSMENT OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

- **Forum for Decisionmaking.**—In early years Congress provided the Metro decisionmaking forum. Since the creation of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) in 1966, the region's governments have negotiated most transit policy decisions during WMATA board meetings, although the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (through its Transportation Planning Board) is the officially designated forum. Under these circumstances WMATA's transit planning has tended to be inadequately coordinated with the efforts of other agencies. Relevant agencies are notified of WMATA's plans but, in general, only those who are helping pay for the system have influence on the plans. Early Metro planners were sharply criticized for failure to coordinate effectively with interested public agencies.
- **Accountability of Decisionmakers.**—Early Metro planners bore no direct responsibility to a constituency. In contrast, most WMATA board members must hold elected positions in their jurisdictions and, through them, can be held accountable by the public for their actions. The agency was created by interstate compact and given authority to plan transit (although the power to make long-range transit decisions now nominally belongs to the Council of Governments).
- **Public Involvement.**—The general public was excluded from early Metro planning

and involved in system selection only indirectly through their elected officials. Although the courts since then have forced WMATA to hold public hearings on station area plans, the agency has never taken the lead in structuring a process to involve citizens in a more substantive way.

2. ASSESSMENT OF THE TECHNICAL PLANNING PROCESS

- **Goals and Objectives.**—Metro was planned before it was common to develop formal goals. Responding to widespread public concern over the implications of future growth, NCTA assumed it had a mandate to plan an extensive rapid rail system in order to cut back the highway program. The ensuing controversy contributed to delaying a decision to build Metro for several years.
- **Development of Alternatives.**—The two early studies (1959 and 1962) considered highway, express bus, and rail transit alternatives in a multimodal approach that was advanced for its time. However, only transit alternatives were considered in the 1967 study that led directly to adoption of the Regional Metro System, and at least one of the alternatives was designed to answer political rather than technical concerns.
- **Evaluation of Alternatives.**—Although based on an outmoded regional comprehensive plan, the Washington region's first transit study in 1959 conducted a fair evaluation of alternatives. In contrast, the planning during the next 3 years, which laid the groundwork for the system eventually adopted, was accused of biasing its data to favor rail transit. In fact, the political debate on the transit versus highways issue had more influence in shaping transit decisions than the technical findings did.

. **Financing and Implementation.**—From the earliest period Metro supporters assumed that the system would be backed by Federal money and that it would eventually turn a profit. As construction

costs and projected operating deficits both rise, local governments and the Federal Government alike are wary of making new financial commitments, and as a result completion of the system is in jeopardy.