Appendix C

Case Studies of Regional Planning Agencies

OTA examined a cross-section of multipurpose regional planning organizational to evaluate their effectivenew and reviewed the status of regional planning in two States-Tennessee and Idaho. Although the regional agencies were highly individual, the study revealed much about the current status of regional planning and highlighted areas that need to be strengthened.

Generally, the more formal authority a regional agency has, the more status and clout it has within the region. The regional agencies with the best records for implementing plans were lead agencies for at least two or more regional infrastructure programs. For example, designation by the State as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) as the lead agency for water and air quality programs or for economic development defines an agency's institutional role, guaranteeing its involvement in those programs and opening the door for wider participation.[2] The MPO designation is the most important, because it brings with it U.S. Department of Transportation planning funds and the authority to prepare the mandated regional transportation improvement plan.

However, in many regions **a different agency is designated as lead for each separate responsibility, reflecting the lack of agreement by the State and** locality on who should speak for the region. None of the regional agencies studied had responsibility for planning all major infrastructure **categories. Moreover,** although regional agencies prepare comprehensive **plans and coordinate** Federal **and** State projects, functional planning **responsibilities arc frequently distributed to different agencies. As** a result, functional plans are not tied to comprehensive regional plans. Even within one infrastructure category, authority is frequently dispersed. In transportation, some States have chosen to establish multiple, single-county MPOs instead of one regional agency, where several counties form the metropolitan area. In Tennessee, none of the regional planning agencies has been designated as an MPO.[3]

Authority is dispersed for several reasons. The Federal Government may disperse authority by designating a different agency to perform a task than the State uses. Most State agencies favor organizationst o w h i c h t h e y customarily delegate program responsibilities. Local elected officials prefer to involve their own districts in decisionmaking and are not eager to have an agency designated by the Federal or State government take the lead. As an example, in Michigan, the State recently established a State economic development agency, but the Federal Government continues to fired the original planning agencies.

Regional planning organizations can establish a leadership role by using their technical and analytic expertise to provide needed local services to address local priorities. The data collection and analytic work of many regional agencies provide the technical foundations for numerous regional **decisions, and the organization is often the only source for reliable regional data To maintain this role the** agency has to maintain its databases and retain qualified staff, difficult tasks if funding levels are low. In addition, most regional planning agencies operate one or more regional service programs, such as ridesharing or programs for aged persons; these bring additional status, some income, and enhance their credibility within the region.

Regional agencies may provide another valuable service if they **function as a regional** *ombudsman* **-available to** identify problems and provide a forum for discussing **controversial issues of regional significance. Some agencies go a step further and help to resolve regional conflicts, although success in this role depends heavily on the stature** of the Executive Director. In 1988, the North Central Texas Council of Governments successfully resolved air quality issues within the region, achieving agreement on a plan that avoided Environmental Protection Agency sanctions, for example.

[1]Maricopa Association of Governments (Phoenix, Central Texas Council of Governments, Baltimore Regional Planning council, San Diego Association of Governments, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, and Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council.

[2]Campbell Associates, "Regional Planning," OTA contractor report, June 1989, p. 15.

[3]Ibid., app. A-5, p. 7.