

Summary and Highlights

- Los Angeles, the second largest metropolitan area in the United States, spreads out in a distinctive style of development. Although the city's CBD is strong, major centers of employment and residential development are scattered throughout the area in a decentralized, low-density pattern.
- Planning for rapid rail in Los Angeles has been dominated since 1964 by the Southern California Rapid Transit District (SCRTD). SCRTD has narrowly interpreted its mandate to develop a regional mass transit system by calling for a BART-type fixed-guideway technology.
- This preference, combined with the requirement to seek areawide financing support in regional referenda, has encouraged the design of extensive transit systems in order to provide adequate service to voters in Los Angeles suburbs.
- Ironically, the systems placed before voters in 1968 and 1974 were defeated partly because the suburbs were unwilling to bear the cost of so expensive an investment.
- With the encouragement of the State legislature, SCRTD has now taken a different approach by trying to develop a consensus on an acceptable "starter line," financed with "voter-free" State funding. This project, much more limited in scope than the previous ones, seems to have a good chance of success.
- SCRTD'S single-minded advocacy of a fixed-guideway rapid transit system has made it uneasy with the task of evaluating alternative transportation modes. UMTA has repeatedly urged SCRTD to provide a balanced view of alternative transportation options and to formulate short-term transit improvements.
- The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) has not been strong enough to exert control over the activities of SCRTD. Although SCAG'S influence is growing, SCRTD until recently has operated with a considerable degree of autonomy. This situation hindered UMTA'S efforts since 1971 to ensure that the Los Angeles transit system was designed within the context of a regional transportation plan.
- SCRTD'S community involvement procedures have included public meetings and a citizens' advisory committee, as well as the two referenda. However, SCRTD has failed to structure and regularize participation at regional, corridor, and neighborhood levels.
- Planning for rapid transit in Los Angeles has become more sophisticated during the past 5 years, albeit in large part under pressure from UMTA and SCAG. SCRTD gradually has expanded the process to include an examination of regional and local objectives, more thorough analysis of alternatives, and greater consideration of short-term transit improvements.