

Summary Case Assessment

The purpose of this section is to summarize the transit planning and decisionmaking process in the Los Angeles region in light of the guidelines listed in the Introduction to the case assessments. The summary, therefore, is divided into two parts: (1) Assessment of the Institutional Context, and (2) Assessment of the Technical Planning Work.

1. ASSESSMENT OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

- **Forum for Decisionmaking.**—The institutional forum for decisionmaking in Los Angeles is not well integrated, and no authoritative procedure exists for resolving conflicts between decisionmakers. Although the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is the official forum, in fact the Southern California Rapid Transit District (SCRTD) operates with a considerable degree of autonomy. The seven organizations involved in transit in the Los Angeles area now sit on the Rapid Transit Advisory Committee (RTAC), formed to develop a “starter” line plan after the 1974 defeat of a proposed regional system. But the RTAC is only an ad hoc arrangement and does not provide a lasting resolution to the conflicts over transit policymaking and priority setting.
- **Accountability of Decisionmakers.**—The composition of SCRTD’S board has lessened its ability to respond to the complexities of the region. The City of Los Angeles appoints only two of the board’s members; pressures from the suburban majority may have influenced SCRTD’S choice of extensive transit proposals in 1968 and 1974. The high cost of these systems led suburban voters to defeat them, thus penalizing the people of the center city who were most willing to support rapid transit.
- **Public Involvement.**—SCRTD’S community involvement procedures have

included public meetings, a citizens’ advisory committee, and two referenda. But its failure to structure ongoing participation for citizens at regional, corridor, and neighborhood levels of planning may have contributed to defeat of SCRTD’S two rapid transit proposals.

2. ASSESSMENT OF THE TECHNICAL PLANNING PROCESS

- **Goals and Objectives.**—While SCRTD’S statements of its goals were comprehensive in their coverage, they were often not explicit enough to be useful in guiding selection and evaluation of alternatives. SCRTD’S planning responded more to its interpretation of its legal mandate (to build a mass rapid transit system) than to local community goals.
- **Development and Evaluation of Alternatives.**—SCRTD’S legislative mandate to effect a mass transit system combined with its commitment to a fixed-guideway system to make SCRTD uneasy about conducting an open-minded evaluation of alternative transportation modes. Pressure from UMTA to enforce the requirement of alternatives analysis focused on the issue of whether SCRTD had given adequate attention to low-cost bus system improvements.
- **Financing and Implementation.**—The need to secure the local share of the funding through a public referendum put SCRTD’S planning process on an unstable basis. SCRTD’S interpretation of its mandate led to the design of fixed-guideway systems; its method of financing led to extending these systems for the benefit of suburban voters. Ironically, these voters were unwilling to pay the high cost of the systems designed to please them.