

Section M THE CONTINUING PROCESS

The 1962 Federal Aid Highway Act, the benchmark legislation for transportation planning, quite purposefully included the word “continuing” as part of the process descriptors.¹ ISTEA supports that concept with more specificity by requiring “*the transportation plan shall be reviewed and updated at least triennially in non-attainment or maintenance areas and at least every five years in attainment areas to confirm its validity and its consistency with current and forecasted transportation and land use conditions and trends. . .*” Under current regulations, the Kalamazoo metropolitan area transportation plan must be updated in 2005.

That requirement reflects the likely dynamics of many urban areas. As they develop, redevelop, and reshape, there are shifts in land use and transportation patterns that are difficult to envision at any one point in time. Also, three years from now, KATS will have further advanced the development and application of the Management Systems to the point of being an even more advanced tool to aid in transportation decision making. This 2025 Plan was strongly influenced by the Pavement Management System (PMS) efforts. It was critical to the selection of preserve projects that focus on maintaining our existing system. During the next three years, we can direct our efforts and resources to advance the other Management Systems to having similar direct application value.

Even more basic is the necessity to enhance our abilities to effectively and efficiently measure the dynamics of our systems. Surveillance and monitoring is a key element in the continuing process. Sound, reliable data must be available to evaluate the accuracy and reliability of land use forecasts and travel projections to assure the integrity of these basic transportation plan development tools.

¹ The 1962 Act referenced “the comprehensive, cooperative, continuing” (3C) transportation planning process.

Data collection is expensive, and yet the value of good data is immeasurable. The engineer's position is typically, “if you cannot measure it, disregard it.” There is a need to focus on cost-effective, accurate data collection processes. A starting point is to first exploit all the data that is available through secondary sources, often collected for purposes very foreign to our own.

Socio-economic data is the one area where external sources can be exploited. Local governments invariably issue building permits, keep real estate tax records from which we can quite directly measure dwelling units, business locations, and similar demographic data. The Michigan Employment Security Commission (MESCC) data can be used in conjunction with other data sets, such as single business tax records, sales tax records, or similar data sets to locate employment points. With reasonable cooperation and prudent use, coupled with electronic data processing, there are simply scores of possibilities.

Direct measurement of system performance is not as easy to approach indirectly. Traffic counting programs are an expensive necessity. Traffic counts must be available for nearly every aspect of transportation system development and operations from planning, operations, design, pavement management, and more. Cost sharing among the many uses makes data collection for any single program affordable. The Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study has an aggressive traffic counting program, however, data collection efficiency and effectiveness review is still warranted.

Similarly, we must improve the input and methods by which we use the modeling process. Measurement of average travel speed is but one example. If the model is to replicate system performance, we must be able to reliably replicate performance attributes.

Most of the management systems are data-need intensive. This often translates to expensive. In the Kalamazoo metropolitan area, over \$200,000 has been directed to the

Pavement Management System (PMS) since inception. Even with that level of expenditure, each agency believes it has value. As we advance the other management systems, we can similarly expect significant data cost and can expect similar value. The transportation industry overall is pressured by financial limitations. More and more must be done with less and less. That factor in itself makes transportation planning more critical than ever. There is a need for cost-effective and performance efficient solutions. There can not be any unnecessary nor uncoordinated efforts in the process. Each and every transportation planning effort must have a direct linkage to implementation.

The public involvement process must be reviewed and reinvigorated to improve the quality of the opportunities provided for public involvement. Better use of local agency efforts and programs as well as improved efforts by the direct staff of the Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study must be evaluated. Improvements consistent with resources and other program needs need to be identified and implemented over the development of future planning efforts.

A direct linkage between the Study's efforts and implementation of sound programs and projects has been continually emphasized at the Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study. KATS's strength is working cooperatively with the local transportation providers towards the solution of their problems. This work must be accomplished within the framework of a sound program and can only be achieved cooperatively. Emphasis cannot be focused on a single program, study, or project, but on the transportation system analysis and the development of transportation system plans and programs. Cooperative efforts cannot be limited to one specific effort or at a specific time . . . it must happen every day.