

TRB Special Report 288: FTA Comments

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January 16, 2007

Topics

- ▶ Observations on Key Findings
- ▶ Lessons Learned from FTA Experience
- ▶ Possible Implications

Observations on Key Findings

- ▶ Major deficiencies in current practice
 - Consistent with FTA observations
- ▶ National travel forecasting committee
 - Potentially useful
- ▶ National travel forecasting handbook
 - A tall order
- ▶ Laudable FTA efforts to “ensure quality”
 - Perhaps a special case

FTA Experience

- ▶ The “New Starts” program
 - Discretionary capital funds for major projects
 - FTA funding recommendations to Congress
 - ▶ Based on specific criteria defined by Congress
 - ▶ Source of several key measures: *travel forecasts*
 - Setting
 - ▶ Scrutiny of forecasts (and actual ridership outcomes)
 - ▶ SAFETEA-LU incentives for reliable numbers
 - ▶ FTA leverage with respect to project sponsors

FTA Experience

- ▶ Forecasting deficiencies
 - Errors in the travel models themselves
 - Badly defined alternatives/networks
 - Forecasts unable to withstand any scrutiny
 - Little attempt to develop insights into:
 - ▶ Purpose and need
 - ▶ Actual performance of the alternatives
 - ▶ Benefits to travelers
 - ▶ Merits of the project

FTA Experience

- ▶ Leading causes of deficiencies
 - Too much effort on model development
 - Not enough effort on the basics
 - ▶ Data assembly
 - ▶ Testing of the models against current data
 - Absence of analytical reporting of forecasts
 - ▶ Barrier to meaningful quality control (QC) reviews
 - ▶ Barrier to development of insights from the forecasts

FTA Experience

- ▶ FTA initiatives to improve forecasts
 - Some research; some longstanding guidance
 - Requirements for data collection
 - Continual technical assistance
 - Requirements for detailed reporting of forecasts
 - **Rigorous oversight** of forecasts
 - Requirements for written insights from forecasts
 - Specific decision on acceptance of forecasts

FTA Experience

▶ Lessons learned

■ Cause of problems

- ▶ Travel forecasting practice, not model forms
- ▶ Biggest payoffs in improvements to the basics

■ Guidance helps but rigorous oversight is crucial

■ Requirements get attention and action

- ▶ 1992 FTA guidance
- ▶ 2002 FTA requirements

FTA Experience

▶ Possible implications

■ Report recommendations:

▶ Are laudable

▶ Would not have improved New Starts forecasts

▶ Face large challenges

■ Forecasts that have key role in important decisions?

■ Motivations for improvements by funding providers?

■ Mechanisms for effective scrutiny/oversight?

■ Need for thought on supporting strategies to enhance the effectiveness of recommendations

Conclusions

- ▶ Agreement with the general findings
- ▶ Support for improvements in the basics
 - More – and more frequent – data collection
 - Careful testing of travel models
 - Analytical reporting and rigorous QC of forecasts
- ▶ Suggestion that success will be a challenge given the nature of the setting