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Metropolitan Transportation Commission:**

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Planning Styles in Conflict at the San Francisco Bay Area's Metropolitan Transportation Commission

Judith Innes and Judith Gruber

Planning can be a contentious process. Most of the time it involves many players and many interests all seeking different outcomes or protecting different turf. We have concluded, after a 5-year study of transportation planning in the San Francisco Bay Area, that the contentiousness can be due as much to differences in planning styles as to substantive disagreements or power struggles. We have identified four planning styles that coexisted in this transportation decision making process, which we have labeled “technical/bureaucratic,” “political influence,” “social movement,” and “collaborative.” Practitioners of each style tended to believe deeply in their approach as the right way to do things and, by the same token, to regard with suspicion if not actual hostility, those practicing different styles. Indeed, they typically did not recognize the others’ approaches as planning at all.

Each of these styles implied different ideas about information, public participation, and what a good plan would be like, as well as about the process of planning. We found that each style had strengths and limitations and each was suited to different situations. Yet few individuals, agencies, or interest groups tailored their approach to suit the problem. Instead, they routinely used one planning style regardless of the situation.

The style in use at any time was the product of at least two forces. Most obvious was the influence of long habits and expectations among the players. But such habits and expectations do not provide the full explanation. We found that state and federal legislation governing transportation decision making reinforced, and at times almost required, particular planning styles. It is particularly ironic that legislation ostensibly designed to encourage collaboration in regional decision making, often in fact promoted the political influence and technical/bureaucratic approaches, which in turn encouraged the development of an oppositional social movement.

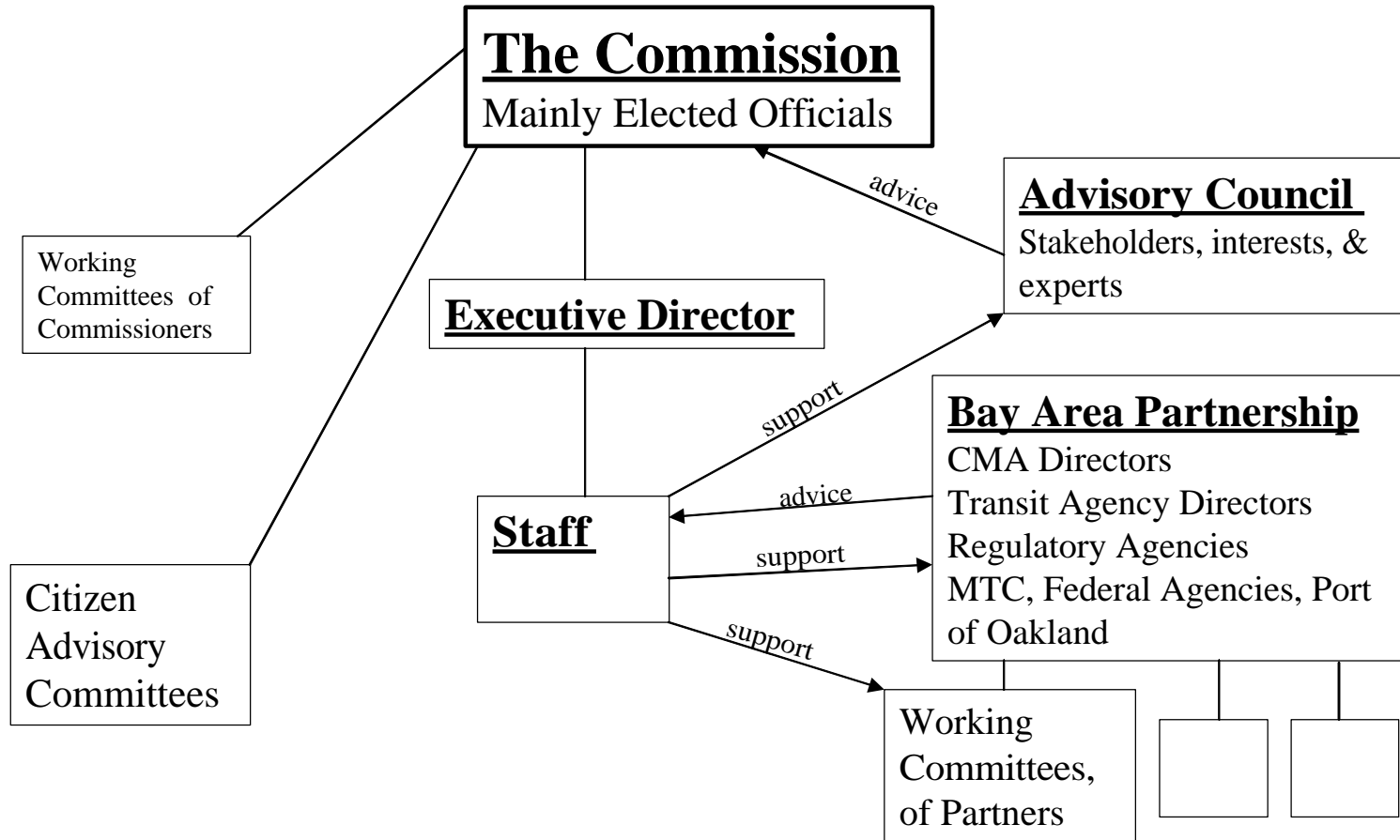
These findings emerged from a study of the Bay Area’s Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) from late 1995 to early 2000 (Innes and Gruber 2001). The study had a dual purpose. The first was to see how this agency, widely regarded as one of the leading

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) in the country and a potential model for others, was implementing ISTEA,¹ the pathbreaking federal transportation legislation passed in 1991. The second was to find out the degree to which the collaborative planning group MTC had set up, the Bay Area Partnership, was producing decisions that were designed to benefit the region as a whole rather than simply individual jurisdictions.² We were interested in the conditions under which interagency and interjurisdictional planning can actually be done. We wanted to test the hypothesis, based on preliminary findings from our earlier research (Innes, et al. 1994), that genuine regionalism would require collaborative dialogue among the key players. This case allowed us to observe the actual deliberations over time and to find out how, when and why decisions were made.

MTC and the Bay Area Partnership

MTC is responsible for preparing the Bay Area's regional transportation plan and allocating millions in state and federal funding each year. Since the passage of state legislation in 1988 and then of ISTEA in 1991, MTC has had considerable legal authority for allocating funding across modes, counties, transit agencies and projects. Its political challenges are substantial with nine counties, 100 cities, and 28 separate transit agencies in the region. Practical challenges are equally substantial with mountainous topography and a bay separating the parts of this far-flung metropolitan area. Significant interest conflicts complicate the issue, with advocates for transit and compact development in conflict with highway and suburban development interests. The Commission has 19 members, of which 14 are elected officials chosen by the counties and cities. The agency has about 100 well educated and competent staff. The staff set up the Bay Area Partnership in 1992 to help implement ISTEA. The 37 Partners include the directors of the nine County Congestion Management Agencies (CMAs),³ of the major transit agencies, and the relevant federal, state and regional agencies and port authorities. This group established committees on topics ranging from fund programming and preparing the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), to regional system management. MTC provided staff (Figure 1).

**Figure 1 Metropolitan Transportation Commission:
A Simplified Organizational Chart**



The Study

The researchers attended hundreds of hours of committee, Commission, and Partnership Board meetings, interviewed in-depth at least 60 participants and staff, and interviewed many others more informally.⁴ Careful, nearly verbatim notes were taken. Hundreds of documents prepared for these meetings were reviewed, and media reports were collected. This information was analyzed to develop a coherent and detailed story of the transportation planning process, identifying and accounting for the important events and outcomes. We attempted to make sense of the differing perspectives of respondents while paying particular attention to the issue of regionalism. The story was reviewed for accuracy by MTC staff.

Overall Findings

We found some successes for MTC and the Partnership, some failures and a number of activities that had mixed results. On the success side, they developed a multimodal scoring system for rating and ranking projects which allowed them to agree across the Partnership on which projects should be funded. They were able to obligate the funds they had each year because they developed the necessary trust to divert funds from projects that were not ready to move forward in one county to projects in another county, with the understanding that funding in another year would compensate. They presented a united front for much of the time to legislators in Sacramento and to their own commissioners about the regional plan and about who would get what. They developed the political capital to push for state and federal legislation and projects with some success. These agreements meant that the region could maximize its resources and power. MTC also succeeded in agreeing on how to coordinate transportation models around the region and developed an innovative Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) program for communities to plan and build small projects to create more transit and pedestrian friendly environments.

On the other hand, MTC was not able to do regional system management, nor even generate interest in the topic; the Partners never agreed on criteria to fund regional projects and mostly did not agree to fund them at all; and they never came to understand how the region worked or how the different jurisdictions were interdependent. They did not develop a vision of what the transportation system should be like. The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) was little more than a package of projects, with no framework or rationale for how these would solve such regional problems as congestion and air quality. The Partners did not

develop much social capital or mutual understanding despite meetings every week or two. The transit agencies were as mistrustful of the CMAs in 2000 as they were in 1992, still regarding them as highway oriented. San Francisco and some of the transit agencies by 2000 had begun actively opposing key MTC investment decisions. Environmental and social equity interests became increasingly angry, forming into a well organized social movement, which has held up the federal recertification of MTC's planning process and brought two lawsuits. Finally a series of major regional projects remained contentious. These include the new span of the Bay Bridge, the redevelopment of a major transit terminal in San Francisco, and the extension of BART⁵ to the airport. The first was delayed by a decade; the second as yet has no solution; and the third, MTC adopted over opposition of many Partners.

Explanations: A Typology of Planning Styles

Although substantive differences in transportation priorities played a part in the conflicts, there was much we observed that could not be explained this way. As we reviewed the transcripts of meetings and interviews, we realized that there were four distinct styles of planning⁶ represented among them. Some individuals mainly subscribed to one and some to another. Sometimes individuals operated in one style in one context and in a different one in another. Some processes and tasks were managed largely one way and some in another. Most of the time the styles coexisted uncomfortably. Once we identified the planning styles, patterns emerged and many aspects of the story became easier to account for. It became clear the rules of the game were not shared. This created confusion and ill will and made agreement difficult. It was also frequently the case that a planning style was applied that was inappropriate to the task, and as a result an effort failed.

The Technical/Bureaucratic Style

This style of planning derives from the “rational/technical” approach. In its ideal form, as taught in planning and public policy schools, professionals operate as analysts whose job it is to explore a wide range of alternatives against objectives to see which will work best. Their job is to find the best way to meet goals. They do projections and make predictions; evaluate actions; assess impacts; do cost effectiveness analyses; and design and run models. They are neutral advisors who try to provide objective information, typically in quantitative form, to convince decision makers. Unfortunately, an ample literature suggests that this ideal type model of setting goals, doing analyses, and convincing decision makers seldom works quite this way. Information all too often fails to

influence, or misses the point that the decision makers care about (Innes 1998). Such analysts often therefore find themselves attached to bureaucracies doing required analyses or providing documentation for proposals that are all but decided upon already.

Much of what goes on at MTC could be described as being in a technical/bureaucratic style of planning. As a practical matter, many planners at MTC spent much of their time interpreting and applying regulations. They did required quantitative analyses, analyzed project proposals to see how they fit criteria for funding categories, and prepared materials to meet reporting requirements. Because of the complexity of rules of funding pots and constant changes in the laws and funding opportunities, many planners at a transportation agency like MTC are needed to do this work. They seldom had the opportunity to do what the rational model would have them do—namely, assess alternatives in the light of the data and objectives.

A good regional plan from this perspective was one that met all the requirements of the legislation, was consistent with MTC's five official goals, and had all the backup information required. While it may well be that individual technical planners had personal opinions about what should be done in the region, they did not express these.

The information the technical planners used was mostly quantitative and developed by themselves or their consultants. They used information on the status and characteristics of projects. They did polls and focus groups to get public opinion about projects and strategies. They seldom cited qualitative information or told stories about the issues. They typically rejected "anecdotal" information and mistrusted data from sources other than government agencies.

Public participation had a very limited role for the technical planners. In this model of planning, there is a strict division of labor. Citizens and elected officials provide the values and goals and review the alternatives to make decisions among them. Planners develop the alternatives and do the analysis. Though some of them did meet with the public in workshops or hearings, they typically did so with a list of predefined alternatives and asked for "feedback." If the members of the public, or even Partners, wanted to discuss something that was not on the list, these planners typically put those requests off. They repeatedly reminded participants what the goals and responsibilities of MTC were and declared some topics therefore off limits. For example, when some wanted to discuss the issue of access, planners pointed out that access was not one of MTC's goals. They did not discuss the content of the data or

analyses with these participants other than to tell them the conclusions they reached or occasionally to answer a question about assumptions.

The Political Influence Style

This planning style is not taught to professional planners or policy analysts. It is not even planning as those two professions see it. However, in transportation as in other policy arenas, this is the dominant approach in practice. In the political influence model,⁷ a leader or agency works with players on a one-on-one basis, keeping them personally attached and cooperative with a larger agenda by offering them things they each want. The system depends on personal loyalty, cemented by reciprocity between the leader and those who are benefitting. It depends on promises being kept. It also depends on a system of divisible benefits (in transportation policy, typically individual projects) that can be distributed to key players to assure that they are coopted into supporting the overall package. Defections are punished, but loyalty lasts only as long benefits keep coming.

At MTC, this was the dominant way that funding decisions were made. Most senior staff and CMA directors subscribed to this approach as normal and appropriate. One even told us this should be called “the government model.” The RTP was developed around projects chosen by the transportation agencies around the region. When we asked one senior staff member what had been the best aspect of ISTEA and the Partnership, he said it had allowed MTC to do more and smaller projects for a wider range of players. The Executive Director often cited a regional agreement that the Commission had put together in 1988 as the model for the Partnership. This was a package of rail projects in most parts of the region that MTC was committed to funding and all players were supposed to support. These projects became part of the promise that he felt had to be kept to hold the Partnership together. In an interview at a much later date, another senior staff member acknowledged that some of the projects were not desirable from a regional perspective, but to revisit them would open up so much conflict it would not be worthwhile.

MTC used a hybrid of the classic model of behind-the-scenes deals and a formula-based approach that assured funding for all the key players. It had the advantage of some transparency while allowing MTC to maintain some discretionary decision making. ISTEA was designed to pool many funds formerly allocated by formula or segregated into pots for different modes and purposes. The idea was that a state or region would allocate funds in ways that best met their needs. Formula allocation was not supposed to be used. However, in early 1992, MTC staff sought

special permission from the US Department of Transportation to allocate much of their ISTEA funding by formula. Half of the money from the Surface Transportation Program (STP) would be allocated on a formula basis to each of the nine Bay Area counties, used on projects of the county's choosing and subject only to ISTEA requirements. The other half would also be allocated on a formula basis to the counties, but the projects funded would be determined on the basis of regionally developed scoring criteria. This special permission request came at the initiative of the staff. Staff, including the technical planners, seemed to believe then and throughout our study that the culture and practice of allocating something to everyone was so ingrained that they could not fight it. In a memo introducing the idea of using formulas, a senior staff member said "*MTC wants to get out of this alive.*" (Italics in memo.)

In the political influence model, a good regional plan is one that has the support of all the powerful players. It is the sum of the individual interests of the powerful players. Political influence planners appeared to be substantively neutral about what the region ought to be like. Their regional vision was that money would flow into the region, funding would be fully obligated each year, visible projects would be built, and the key players would be satisfied. A Caltrans official said about the 1998 RTP (p. 320), "I commend MTC for a good, balanced report with something for everyone." A Commissioner similarly commended the RTP saying, "If you read it, you can see if you are helped or not."

Information is important to political planners, but in quite different ways than it is for technical planners. Political planners do not ask what will solve regional problems best or what is most cost effective. Though they do not make choices based on data about a problem or project, they need good supporting data for what they propose. The funding package they submit has to fit the requirements and assure that deals cannot be legally challenged. These planners therefore had a mutually beneficial, if uneasy, partnership with the technical planners at MTC. The high quality technical work provided legitimacy to the RTP and impressed funding agencies with MTC's professionalism and expertise. Political planners also needed information to help in the political tasks of selling the program to the public, raising funds, and getting support for the agency. Thus, MTC did marketing studies to figure out what projects would get most votes if they were in a revenue measure on the ballot. They began studies to develop a "brand" for the agency and increase its public recognition. But perhaps the most central information the political planners at MTC relied on was about who was powerful, who wanted what, who was loyal and who had done their share. When we reviewed our case study with one senior staff member, his major critique of our

story was that we had failed to assign credit and blame properly. He gave us his version of the history, which was focused on individuals taking various actions. It was about who played the game and who did not. At the time, there were demands for an expensive extension of BART into San Jose. His reaction was not about whether it was a good idea, but about whether the players in that area deserved this since they had not put up funding for highway improvements years earlier.

Broad based public involvement is not compatible with political influence planning, where much is done quietly with individual beneficiaries. This sort of negotiation is done behind closed doors, not because it is illegal but because it is particularistic. Were the negotiations to be open, stakeholders might perceive other players as getting special favors, which others would then want. One political MTC planner told us he regarded the transportation agencies as his “constituents.” Political planners chose focus groups and meetings with selected local leadership around the region as ways of getting input. Moreover, the practice of presenting only project options staff had already developed effectively limited public discussion.

In the political influence model where public participation does exist, it ideally involves a blue ribbon committee of hand picked, trustworthy and well respected individuals from different sectors. MTC set up such a Blue Ribbon Advisory Council (BRAC) for the Partnership, with a combination of academics, federal agency leadership and people representing environmental interests, business, trucking among others. The idea, according to the Executive Director, was to get advice from them about new technologies and to “broaden the Partnership base.” It was conceived as a way to bring more players into the MTC sphere of influence rather than to get input from public groups. Interest among members quickly waned due to lack of an agenda and influence. When the remaining members became strident critics, staff disbanded the group, with agreement of the Partnership.

MTC leadership’s discomfort with public participation was evident at many points in our study. Although all meetings were open to the public, few attended. Conflict was under the surface and not publicly aired in the political model. On one occasion when a militant group of bus riders came to a Commission meeting to vocally protest a policy, staff were angry and blamed the transit agency’s director. She, in turn, told us shaking her head in amazement, “They think I can control these people, but they do the same at our board meetings.” On another occasion when they had to schedule hearings on the 1998 RTP, MTC chose locations scattered around the Bay Area away from the central cities, where the most vocal opponents to their policies were located. Essentially MTC took

the position that the basic public participation should take place at the city and county levels, where projects were initiated.

The Social Movement Style

Social movement planning arises outside of public agencies, generally among groups who feel excluded from public decision making processes. In this planning style, a set of interests join together around a vision. Their goals are to convert people to their views and thereby mobilize public support to influence the decision process. The idea is to make the collective voice of the coalition powerful enough so that it has to be heard, typically through public demonstrations, media attention, and litigation.

This planning style was very much in evidence in Bay Area transportation policy. The dominance of technical and political planning at MTC left out many interests and the broader public. It left out those who are not entitled to funding for projects and those with little political power, like transit riders, environmental justice groups or air quality advocates. It left out a disorganized general public, which according to all the polls, was mainly interested in shorter and more reliable commutes and improvements in transit service. Although MTC had an extensive public information program and all meetings were open to the public, genuine participation was difficult even for the most determined and sophisticated outsider. The jargon and technical discussion at MTC meetings were intimidating and seldom focused on the policy issues of interest to the public and interest groups. Most of the meetings focused on fund programming and clearly much had been decided before the meeting. As one disgusted Partner told us, “The partnership of the technical and the political has produced an abortion.”

In this context, a social movement was born. This movement is spearheaded by the Transportation Land Use Coalition, and it involved organizations representing interests ranging across environmental justice, the disabled, bus riders, and environmental protection.

In the social movement style, a good plan is one that implements the group’s vision—in this case, of a region with compact, transit- and pedestrian-friendly development, well served by transit. Poor inner city residents would have good access to work, health care and shopping. Transportation investments would be more “balanced,” with transit getting a larger share at the expense of highway funding. Driving would be less often the preferred mode, and air quality would improve. Social movement planners outside public agencies worked hard to bring this vision to MTC. They mobilized members for key meetings and did networking among the

interests in the region. They hired professional staff who represented their views in many arenas. They steadily increased their membership. They attracted media attention to their issues. Some of their members were appointed to the Advisory Council that replaced the BRAC.

The information social movement planner's need is primarily data and stories to help dramatize the issues and persuade others to support their vision. They use academic studies or other existing research to help them decide what positions to take on specific topics. They are selective in what they publicize and how they tell their story. They use data for advocacy rather than to question or develop their vision. Technical planners are often critical of the movement's information as biased, but social movement planners are equally skeptical of the information public agencies provide. They recognize there are many self-serving ways that data can be selected, described and presented. They regard these agencies as advocates as well.

As for public participation, social movement planners view what they do as participation. The organizations are open to all like-minded joiners, and they typically have active outreach. They bring in the people who are not heard in other forums. However in their own decisions, they do not try to accommodate very different viewpoints since the goal is to achieve a vision that has already been agreed upon. In the case of transportation in the Bay Area, this meant that business representatives, suburban developers and unions were absent from the movement.

Collaborative Planning

In collaborative planning, stakeholders formally representing differing interests in a shared problem meet for face to face dialogue and collective construction of a strategy to address the problem. Participants learn about each other's interests and the problem and, through joint fact finding, agree on information they can all trust and use. They reach mutual understanding and shared meaning. The players learn and coevolve in the process. Under the right conditions, this dialogue can produce results that are more than the sum of the parts and strategies that are only possible through collaboration (Connick and Innes 2001). For this to happen, the dialogue must be self-organizing and authentic in the sense that what people say is sincere, comprehensible, accurate and a legitimate representation of the stakeholder's interest. The stakeholders must represent diverse interests, and decisions must be taken only when all, or most, are in agreement. Under these conditions, collaborative planning can produce a shared vision, innovative solutions and motivations for collective action (Susskind, McKernon and Thomas-Larmer 1999; Innes

and Booher 1999a; Gruber 1994). Collaborative planning may take place in a single group or in a series of linked groups. It may take the form of formal consensus building or other types of collaborative discussion. It requires a facilitator for large groups, as this mode of planning is not one to which most people are accustomed.

We had assumed that a substantial part of the work of the Partnership would involve collaborative planning. It turned out, however, that meetings were mostly of the conventional type with agendas controlled by MTC staff and generally only brief questions and comments from the Partners. There was seldom an effort to understand the interests of the participants, develop a common understanding of a problem or task, or agree on information. Facilitators were rarely used, even for controversial matters.

Collaborative dialogue was, however, the method for developing the scoring system and for discussions of how and when to transfer funding from one county to another. It was used in some of the Partnership retreats. It was the norm in some small task forces doing things like developing a new way to approach the RTP or developing a plan for highway ramp metering. Participants in small groups can listen to each other, explore issues thoroughly, and seek consensus. When participants knew each other well, it was easy even without a facilitator to determine the sincerity of others, to assess whether they could legitimately make the claims they were making, even to challenge them, to decide on the facts, and to question each other to assure all understood what was being said. The most collaborative dialogue we saw in a larger group took place in the Advisory Council, a largely stakeholder-based group of interests. This set of leaders of environmental and social equity groups, directors of nonprofit and business organizations, and union representatives took charge of its own agenda early on, deciding to focus on the controversial transportation land use connection. They requested data from MTC, invited developers to explain the issues and held joint workshops with the Commission. This Council eventually produced a proposal for the innovative TLC program, which gave planning and construction funds to cities and nonprofits for small, transit-friendly projects.

In the collaborative style, a good plan is one which responds to the interests of each of the players and which creates joint benefit. A good plan produces learning and positive working relationships along the way. Collaborative planners are not wedded to an image of what the outcome should be, but this type of dialogue in Bay Area transportation typically led to consideration of regional welfare. Accommodating the interests of stakeholders from around the region required individuals to step back from parochial views to see how the actions of each affected others. In

developing the scoring, for example, some Partners supported criteria that would benefit other players relative to themselves because these criteria made sense for the region. This model also produces strategies that are designed to accommodate differences. In the modeling coordination effort, a checklist was developed to allow small and large counties to use different systems suited to their resources and needs. This was in contrast to a one-size-fits-all approach that might have emerged from a bureaucratic approach.

The information that counts in collaborative planning is what stakeholders agree is true, which may or may not include what experts or staff say. In many collaborative processes, joint fact finding is conducted, where experts are given careful instructions about what is wanted. Their findings are subject to challenges and queries, and often they recalculate the models or change assumptions in response (Connick forthcoming). If stakeholders jointly construct information, that information becomes influential. They have internalized its meaning and trust it (Innes 1998). First-hand stakeholder knowledge about the problem, their own interests and situation, and likely responses to different actions are also essential. Collaborative decision makers pay attention to stories and anecdotes and deliberate through scenario building (Innes and Booher 1999b; Yankelovich 1999).

At MTC, collaborative development of information was very limited, as was the use of stories, scenarios or information about stakeholder interests (as opposed to positions). The staff kept control of most analysis, only occasionally modifying it in response to group concerns. They did, however, prepare a model to predict the consequences of an environmental advocacy group's proposal for the RTP. The Partners also shared knowledge about the status of projects for making funding decisions. The Advisory Council asked for, and sometimes got, information to support their collaborative discussions. On the other hand, a proposal by Partners to ask the transit agencies to provide data for a model that would be sensitive to local conditions was flatly rejected by staff who said they did not trust the transit agencies.

Stakeholder participation is crucial in the collaborative style, but broader public participation is not important if all interests are represented at the table and all have the opportunity to be informed and listened to. Conventional participation methods are necessary, but often counterproductive because they bring in people unfamiliar with the issues, who argue from positions rather than interests and seek to win at the expense of others. These methods do not allow the sort of dialogue that creates indepth understanding of the choices or informed participation (Innes and Booher 2000). At times, it is even necessary in this model to

have meetings that are closed to the public because of the delicacy of negotiations. Some of the smaller, more collaborative groups working on sensitive topics, like the Partnership's steering committee, were de facto closed because it was difficult for a member of the public to find out about them.

Conflicts Among Styles

These four planning styles often came into conflict at MTC, not just because these planners had different views of plans, information, and participation, but because each believed his/her way was right. Each perspective meshes with a world view involving both epistemological assumptions and views of the political and social order. The political influence approach reflects a belief in the legitimacy of political decision making and of elected officials as decision makers. The technical approach reflects a belief in the possibility and importance of providing unbiased information to those who make decisions. Social movement planners believe in their vision and the justice of their cause. Collaborative planners believe that what is right is what an informed, inclusive, and empowered set of stakeholders work out through discussion. It is not surprising that these planners sometimes regarded each other as cynical, naive, or even badly intentioned.

Conflicts showed up in a variety of ways. The uneasy alliance between the technical and political planners was typical. Political influence planners do not view the world as one where there are technically "right" answers, only politically feasible ones. Executive staff operating in the political influence mode carefully controlled the language of reports and the analyses, or occasionally sent them back for rewrite or recalculation in order to reflect their perception of political reality. Political planners appeared to regard many technical staff as politically naive, and they carefully controlled which staff made public appearances. They sometimes made decisions that dismayed the technical planners, like abolishing the scoring.

Technical and social movement planners also came into conflict in a variety of ways. In a set of meetings with environmental justice advocates, for example, staff presented detailed overheads that focused on how to measure equity, but the advocates wanted to talk about their own issues and actual action strategies. They became angry about a proposed survey, saying everyone knew surveys could be biased and they demanded community input into it. The advocates asked a local academic they trusted to mediate, to translate MTC's language so they could understand and help MTC to understand them.⁸ In meetings of the Advisory Council

and RTP task force, advocates asked that MTC measure Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) in the hope of getting the agency to reduce this number which had been rising. The technical planners argued that the measure should go up because MTC had the goal of mobility and VMT reflected mobility. They also argued in bureaucratic fashion that they should not measure anything they could not control. They expected the measures to be used as standards and ways to criticize the agency. They did not understand that advocates wanted to see how the overall system was performing as part of a broader effort to improve the functioning of the region. They saw the question of what MTC could do as a separate issue.

Social movement planners also came into conflict with the political influence planners. They were interested not in projects, but in policies, like investment plans that favored compact development or transit. They wanted to open up the pipeline of promised projects and revisit those decisions. They could not be coopted by projects. They did not play by the political rules of keeping conflicts behind the scenes. They did not maintain public civility. They brought lawsuits, which at least some political planners regarded as unforgiveable betrayals.

All three of the other styles were obstacles to collaborative planning. In one of the most collaborative efforts, a Partnership task force on the RTP in 1996 wanted to move from the largely quantitative approach to assessing projects to a more open-ended dialogue about strategies. They also wanted a more transparent decision process in which they could participate more effectively. They proposed that a set of questions like, "Will this strategy improve economic vitality?" be asked of any proposed policy or action. Staff, partners and others would give qualitative responses, which would be used at various points in the process as the basis for a substantive discussion. Technically oriented staff resisted this idea offering many reasons. It did not fit their routine procedures. They did not like the ambiguity about what the future steps would be or how the answers would be used. They wanted to discuss corridors and projects rather than getting into the "ethereal regional level where we would lose our anchor.... We need to see how principles get operationalized." These staff wanted the task force to evaluate the proposals they had developed in the light of MTC goals. The group of collaboratively oriented Partners, on the other hand, was dissatisfied with both the decision processes and the goals. These Partners tried to jointly construct some data at a more fine grained level than staff had available, and suggested getting the transit agencies to provide ridership information. But staff coming from the technical perspective said they would not trust such data. Partners argued it would just be a first step in improving the data, but staff rejected the idea.

The technical and collaborative styles also clashed when the collaborative group began to make value judgments rather than sticking to precise legal mandates and unambiguously measurable concepts. Staff objected to a proposed question referring to “good” transit service, saying that was subjective, and to the term “renewable energy,” arguing everything was renewable. They objected to what they called “value laden questions,” while Partners insisted the whole point of the questions was to choose what would be desirable. Eventually staff took the collaboratively crafted questions and rewrote them, eliminating topics like land use, narrowing others from broad perspectives like, “What is the impact on low income communities?” to refer to specific legislative mandates like, “How will this provide assistance to the welfare-to-work program?” The normative dimension of the questions largely disappeared. In the end, the questions were modified and adopted by the Partnership for use, but staff never applied them. This group of Partners were frustrated and angry, and one told us they “came to the brink” of a real conflict with staff, but stepped back. Their serious effort to create a collaborative dialogue about the RTP had failed. In our observation, they never made another comparable effort.

An even more serious conflict emerged between the collaborative and political influence styles. The norm of allocation by entitlement and secret deals reinforced parochialism and undermined the motivation to cooperate, particularly where funding was at stake. This undermined MTC’s own efforts, for example, to get a collaborative agreement on how to define regional projects or on funding of such regional efforts as ridesharing. Partners operating in the political mode saw any regional project as taking away from funding they could have. Because they had little shared understanding of how the region worked, they could see no benefit to themselves from letting any funding go to another agency or county.

The clash between these two modes was particularly evident when a major federal law governing transportation finance was changed, reopening the question of how federal funding should be allocated to counties. San Francisco asked for a dialogue on a new formula based on employment and population on the grounds that their transit served almost half the passengers in the region, many of whom came from other counties. The San Francisco planners were collaborative in their preferences and wanted at least a thoughtful discussion of what was at stake. The other counties, preferring to rely on a political mode that would preserve deals struck in the past, were unwilling to entertain the idea, even those that would benefit from the San Francisco proposal. They believed this was just a self-interested ploy of San Francisco and came up with their

own formulas to benefit their counties. They seemed to think it was a game and expressed no concerns about need or fairness or what was good for the region to the frustration of the San Francisco planners.

San Francisco was insistent in pressing its view that the issue of the formula should be opened up to collaborative dialogue, and a meeting of the Partnership Board was called to do so. By the time the meeting took place, however, the agenda had been filled with many other issues and the time allowed for discussion of the formula was so truncated that it was impossible to engage in meaningful collaborative dialogue. San Francisco planners were angry not to have been taken seriously and took their challenge to the Commission, breaking apart what had been largely a consensual process to that time. Though they did not win there, they did learn that the game was deals and not dialogue.

Accounting for Success and Failure

Each of these planning styles has strengths and limits and works best under different conditions. As Figure 2⁹ shows, the technical bureaucratic style works best when there is a low diversity of interests and little interdependence among them. It basically requires a unitary decision maker because it has no repertoire for dealing with conflicting or ambiguous goals nor with multiple clients.¹⁰ This style works well where there is known technology and known goals (Christensen 1985). For example, it would be appropriate if all parties agree that the goal is to maximize the number of people who can get access to a particular site for a given amount of funding, or to determine which is the most cost effective type of public transport, but not if there is conflict over criteria and uncertainty over the site and the level of funding, or conflict over whether public transportation should be favored over individual cars. It cannot deal with emerging objectives that come from stakeholders, nor is it good at dealing with the large regional picture. Under these circumstances there are just too many variables, too many players, and too much is changing at once for technical analytic methods to handle. At MTC technical planners focused on corridors as more manageable for analysis and shied away from regional thinking. Their great strength and contribution to the region was that they made sure the technical work was of high quality which, in turn, helped assure a steady flow of funding and that MTC was highly regarded by the funding agencies, legislature and executive branch.

Figure 2.
Four Styles of Planning

| | | | |
|---|------|--|--|
| | | <u>Diversity</u> | |
| | | low | high |
| <u>Interdependence of Interests</u> | low | Technical Bureaucratic <i>Convincing</i> | Political Influence <i>Co-opting</i> |
| | high | Social Movement <i>Converting</i> | Collaborative <i>Co-evolving</i> |

Adapted from “Planning Institutions in the Network Society: Theory for Collaborative Planning” by Judith Innes and David Booher in Revival of Strategic Spatial Planning , eds. Willem Salet and Andreas Faludi Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences, Amsterdam.

The political influence style, on the other hand, does an excellent job at dealing with a diversity of interests. This approach is certainly responsible for the remarkable degree of unanimity among the transportation providers in the region for many years as all supported agreements that contained something for almost everyone. This united front was clearly helpful in maximizing funding and getting legislation passed. What this planning style does not do is allow the interests to find out how they may be interdependent. The model involves one-on-one relationships of constituents with the leader. It precludes discovering even greater joint benefit that might arise from cooperating. Indeed, such cooperation among constituents can be threatening to the political influence style by undermining secrecy and creating a collective power that can compete with the leader. This was evident on many occasions. When, for example, Partnership retreats came up with ideas they wanted to pursue, staff did not follow up. When counties wanted to work together

to develop performance measures, MTC planners refused to convene such a meeting, saying MTC would develop its own measures.

The social movement style, by contrast, recognizes and builds on interdependence. Each of the members is dependent on the others to have an impact. The Transportation Land Use Coalition helped many groups, which had been working alone, to see how their interests complimented one another. Environmental groups discovered that their interest in air quality and compact growth was symbiotic with the interest of bus riders in improving transit service. They all discovered a shared interest in improving access to the planning process. The breadth of their coalition made it more credible. They developed a vision that encompassed these interests. The groups were successful in putting this vision on the Commission's agenda on occasion and in bringing the concepts to the public. However, this style deals with only limited diversity of interests. It cannot afford to water down its vision because doing so can threaten the unity of the movement. This style has the strength of focus, but the limitation that it does not work well with other styles and may view others as the enemy and not simply as other stakeholders whose interests must somehow be taken into account.

The collaborative style deals with both diversity and interdependence. It seeks representation from all key interests and it seeks out the ways in which they can, by working together, offer each other reciprocal benefits and create joint value. The Advisory Council was the best example of this, where the dialogue allowed them, first, to understand why transit-based development is difficult and, second, to create a program that would make inroads on the problem and would be popular with all the stakeholders.

Much of the current regional transportation problem in the Bay Area fits in the lower right-hand corner of our matrix. There is a high diversity of interests, and they are interdependent. Environmental concerns cannot be addressed without dealing with highway interests. The success of transit depends on land use policies of local governments. No decision maker, even MTC, has the capacity, authority or knowledge alone to impose a solution, even if the regional players agreed on the problem. It is not surprising that most of the regional and innovative ideas emerged from the groups that were comparatively collaborative. Yet often planners operating in the political or technical style (both within MTC and among the Partners themselves) prevented partners from discovering their interdependence. As a result, they never developed among themselves a basic understanding of how the region worked from an economic, or social standpoint. They never agreed even on a need for a regional vision, much less the content of the vision.

This failure to address both the diversity and interdependence of the system accounts for many of the failures of the process. For example, Partners and most staff came to the task of regional system management as either a technical problem or a political one. Consultants operating in the technical mode prepared reports about performance measures and intelligent transportation systems, and the Partners' eyes glazed over. They were much more interested in the programming of funds than in what they saw as a highly abstract issue. They soon stopped attending the meetings, which they said were "boring" and run "like a class in planning theory." From a political perspective, system management was just a set of projects that potentially could bring in a lot of money and give MTC operating responsibility, but Partners were not interested in sharing their funds. Although better system management could have benefitted all the Partners, especially the transit agencies, attendance got so low the committee was abolished. To develop a strategy and commitment to something as complex and yet practical as system management would have required a long term collaborative dialogue where Partners could have come to understand the technical issues and what was at stake for them, and where they could have come up with some innovative strategy. As one rueful Partner commented,

"My expectation is, when you put a group of geniuses in a room, that you get multiple genius solutions.... If you look around the table, there is a phenomenal amount of talent and energy and power, and we never harnessed it. I think we slipped into mundaneness, routineness, and that will kill genius any time."

Moreover, this failure to recognize the diversity and interdependence among interests in the region was one of the causes of the emergence of the social movement style of planning outside of MTC which, in turn, further impeded the ability of the collaborative style to take hold.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This situation is a reflection that not only is MTC an organization in transition facing a turbulent environment, but also that planning itself as a professional field is in a similar state. The older models of practice are less successful than they once were as society becomes more fragmented and as there is less agreement on values and more conflict among interests and jurisdictions. At the same time, the problems have become more complex to solve, and interdependencies have become greater. In this

process, not only are both the technical and political approaches under fire and less effective than they once were, but also the social movement approach is growing in significance while more experimentation is going on with collaborative approaches.

We believe that MTC, like many other planning agencies, has not recognized sufficiently the importance of developing more collaborative approaches to addressing regional problems and that it needs to do so. There are, however, many obstacles. Some, of course, have to do with the other planning styles and the convictions of the individuals who practice in these styles. But the problem lies more fundamentally in the institutional framework within which planning is practiced. Laws giving out funding by formula, elected officials who earmark funds for pet projects, and expectations that getting reelected depends on “bringing home the bacon” all reinforce the political model and create major obstacles to genuine regional planning. At the same time, the continued complexity of funding arrangements in transportation and the elaborate requirements attached to state and federal funds reinforce the technical style of planning and create barriers for those not technically knowledgeable to participate. Finally, there are few rewards for collaborative planning. It takes time and does not always produce results. It costs money if it is done professionally. It is risky because it could upset long established arrangements, with unknown consequences. There are many pressures for business as usual. More collaborative planning will not happen without policy changes that will encourage it.

We recommend three policy strategies that will provide a more hospitable institutional framework for collaborative planning. The first is to move toward a system of performance-driven governance and away from project-based planning and formula allocations that reinforce the political influence model. Elected officials need something to claim credit for, so they seek projects and try to assure they get the maximum funding. But their constituents care about the performance of the system—how long it takes them to get to work, for example. Stakeholders should be brought together to design a few measures that the public will care about. Formula funding should be gradually reduced as these measures begin to get public attention and understanding and use by elected officials. The second strategy is to reduce the dominance of the technical approach by limiting required documentation and simplifying funding requirements. This can allow for innovation and more opportunities for dialogue among all those with a stake and for more focus on the big picture. The third strategy is to develop incentives and support for collaborative efforts by, for example, offering additional funding or flexibility in regulations for regions that arrive at decisions collaboratively and by providing public

funding for facilitation services. A state or federal agency could also set up forums or arenas where the dialogues can and should take place, providing incentives and opportunities for stakeholders to talk.

The task of institutional change will not be easy or rapid, but it is already in progress. Public policy can move it forward faster and in the most productive direction.

Notes

- ¹ Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act.
- ² We did not assess the decisions by whether they actually were good for the region, which is a separate normative and analytic exercise. We simply looked for whether decisions were intended to do more than serve parochial interests but benefit the larger region or serve a regional purpose.
- ³ These agencies were set up by the legislature to allocate a half-cent sales tax to transportation. They were set up in different ways in each county, with some fairly autonomous and reporting to countywide boards, and others more integrated into county transportation agencies.
- ⁴ We were assisted in this research by an able team of graduate students, who conducted many of the interviews, drafted some sections of the report, and worked closely with us to develop the ideas. These include P. Anthony Brinkman, Kazuya Kawamura, Ray LaRaja, John Cook, Katherine Johnson, and Jonathan Hoffman. We were also assisted in a variety of research tasks by undergraduates Jeanine Pao, James Abrams, Serena Lin, Robert Lim, Erin Hartigan, David Strasberg, Jeff Flores and Mariel Chatman.
- ⁵ Bay Area Rapid Transit.
- ⁶ In this paper, the term ‘planning’ and ‘planners’ will refer to any activity or person playing a part in deciding how transportation funding should be spent. Some of them are formally trained in planning schools and some in other professions and some are active citizens. Professionally trained planners were found operating in all of the four categories.
- ⁷ This is a simplified version of Banfield’s model (1961).
- ⁸ Elizabeth Deakin, personal communication.
- ⁹ Thanks to David Booher (personal communication) and Ann Swidler (personal communication) for assisting us in developing this matrix and to Booher for the four ‘Cs’ differentiating the four models.
- ¹⁰ Technical planners can work with collaborative processes in our observation, but they need to change some of their views of knowledge and neutrality.

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