ABSTRACT

In spite of the impacts that new transportation facilities have upon the economic, social and political structures of established urban areas, the decision process leading to policy formation and plan implementation has received little, if any, attention. Case studies of three County Boroughs in Britain having different urban transport policies suggest that the decision making process is dominated by groups and individuals who attempt to implement policies which benefit the sectional interests which they represent. Within a changing relevant environment, local technicians, politicians and community groups compete and form coalitions in order to acquire authority and implement their own notions of justice and equity in the adaptation of the built environment.

Introduction

In recent years there has emerged an increasing amount of literature relating to problems of state intervention systems and concepts of equity and justice in the distribution and allocation of resources in society. The works of Pahl (1968; 1970), Harvey (1970; 1973), Mumphrey and Wolpert (1973) and Eliot-Hurst (1973) are significant contributions to this field. One reason for this movement is the failure of state intervention systems to live up to their proponents' claims in the increasingly complex and changing situations of the real world (see New Society, December, 1973) and to the growing expectations of individuals, encouraged by the politics of the affluent society.

One of the most significant state intervention systems is controlled by transportation planners and planning bodies in local authorities. Decisions taken by relatively small and identifiable sets of "actors" are largely responsible for the form and nature of new elements of transport infrastructure. Their decisions are especially significant in highly urbanised societies. Little attention has been devoted to either the identification of
these decision makers or to the analysis of the decision processes they
employ. The task of this paper is to identify the locus of decision making
power in three local authorities in Britain between 1945 and 1974, and to
assess how such power has been exercised in the light of current thinking
about social justice and equity in the allocation of resources in society.

The Impact of New Transport Infrastructure
Upon Cities

Numerous theoretical and empirical investigations have shown the
close relationship between land values, land uses and access to transport
facilities in cities (Wingo, 1961; Alonso, 1965; Downs, 1970). Deficiencies
in transportation theory often result in a failure to predict the impact of
new elements of infrastructure upon existing urban areas. A brief review
of transportation planning literature reveals that there exist two distinct
schools of thought regarding the nature of transport problems, of their
appropriate solutions and the type and importance of their impacts that
can be discerned.

One school, defined by Stephen Plowden (1973) as “traditional” is
embodied in many transportation and land use studies. It holds that
increases in urban uses of land in dispersed locations, in car ownership
levels and vehicle usage rates are inevitable and that the resultant increases
in traffic must be accommodated by the construction of new roads. The
adherents of this school maintain that improved road facilities will reduce
congestion and bring large positive benefits to cities in terms of savings in
time, fuel, individual effort and accident costs. In addition, traffic may be
channelled out of “environmental” (usually residential) areas, thereby
reducing levels of pollution, noise, congestion, conflict and disruption,
consequently increasing land values.

Much of this philosophy is based upon the work of Buchanan in
Traffic in Towns (1963). Ashworth (1966) and Blunden (1971) are
amongst many engineers who have also written about the subject. Studies
of the history of the motor car (W. Plowden, 1971) and of the road lobby
(Hamer, 1974) have revealed the nature and extent of pressure groups
with both direct and indirect interest in the promotion of the traditional
philosophy of transportation planning.

The second school of thought, composed mainly of social scientists
and “anti-road” pressure groups, holds that traditional methods of at-
ttempting to reduce levels of congestion are unlikely to be successful, since
new roads encourage the generation of higher traffic levels. In addition it
maintains that benefits which may be produced by the construction of