

CONFERENCE ON ENERGY CONTINGENCY PLANNING IN URBAN AREAS

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It seems curious to be here in the nation's energy capital discussing energy contingency planning while gasoline prices are falling and supplies are plentiful. While we may feel secure today, it is instructive to recall the security that we felt before the 1973/74 gasoline crisis, and the events that followed. It is also useful to recognize that the Middle East, which must continue to be important in the world energy supply picture, is by no means stable. It is not difficult to imagine a set of circumstances which could again interfere with energy supplies in the United States. Because of this uncertainty, and because our urban areas are so economically dependent upon personal mobility, effective energy contingency planning is critical.

AMERICAN URBAN AREAS TODAY

There is a tendency to think of American urban areas as they were before World War II. In order for planning to be effective, urban areas must be viewed as they are today, and not as they used to be. Specifically, urban land use and travel patterns have changed drastically, with dispersion and reduced densities being the rule.

Urban areas have become far less densely populated. This is the result of many factors, including post war housing programs, inexpensive energy, the construction of highways and tax policies which encouraged home ownership. In 1950, the urbanized areas of the United States contained approximately 70,000,000 people, and those urban areas covered an area just a bit larger than the state of Vermont (12,800 square miles). In 1980, the urbanized area population had risen to about 140,000,000, while the area covered by these urban areas exceeded the area of New York state (52,000 square miles).

Despite the popular misconception, this dispersion is not best exemplified by the western cities in which it began, such as Los Angeles. The suburban developments which ring Los Angeles are far more dense than those of the older eastern cities, so much so that, if current trends continue, the Los Angeles urbanized area will become the most densely populated urban area in the nation by 1990 (it currently trails New York by about 300 persons per square mile). The situation was well illustrated during the 1979

energy crisis by the revelation that per-capita gasoline usage is higher in suburban Long Island and in the Washington, D.C. area than in the Los Angeles area.

These far more sparse residential patterns have been accompanied by an exodus of jobs and industry from the central cities. While there have been substantial developments in downtown areas, the great trend of that last 30 years has been toward suburban work locations. Urban work trip patterns are no longer radially oriented to central business districts and industrial areas as a rule, but are often cross-suburbs, urban core to suburbs or through the urban core. Because of the dispersion in work locations, there is no longer the great concentration of destinations which existed before urban sprawl occurred. The newer low and medium density employment locations have insufficient employment densities to justify usable levels of transit service, while often they have just enough density to cause serious traffic problems.

Transit service and transit markets remain strong to the extent that they are directed to the central business districts. In fact, these markets are often so strong that there is not room enough for all the patrons that would wish to ride.

All of this is to say that the city is a complex place, in which we cannot expect a single solution to suffice in a future energy crisis. Transit alone cannot be expected to fill the void in its present form. Where transit markets are strong, there is very limited unused capacity. Where there are not sufficiently concentrated destinations, such as in the suburban employment locations, transit of the variety appropriate for dense urban corridors is simply not an effective solution. Energy contingency planning which is realistic must recognize that the contribution of transit, while important, be limited, and that a vast array of strategies is necessary to retain urban mobility in a future energy emergency.

PREVIOUS ENERGY EMERGENCIES

In the previous energy emergencies of 1973/74 and 1979, government allocation programs were utilized. There has been much feeling that those allocation policies were ineffective, and even contributed to the supply problems which were experienced. In 1979, there was an unmistakable trend of surplus and shortage throughout the nation. The most serious problems were experienced in the Los Angeles area and in the large urban centers of the Northeast Corridor. In many other parts of the country there was no shortage at all. The situation was so severe in Los Angeles, that fewer than five gas stations were open on one weekend. In Los Angeles, there grew the feeling that government was a part of the problem and not a part of the solution. It is hard to imagine that a free market approach of gasoline could have been more disruptive.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR ENERGY CONTINGENCY PLANNING

What does all of this mean to energy contingency planning in urban areas?

There are a number of important principles to keep in mind:

1. There are no simple answers--American urban areas are very complex, and meeting their needs in any energy emergency will require multiple strategies.
2. Public transit has little additional capacity where it can be effective, and where it has capacity it cannot be effectively utilized for the great majority of suburban trips. There are very real limits to the extent which we can rely upon transit.
3. Energy contingency planning must maximize the use of existing resources, while minimizing the necessity of additional public expenditures.

In the next three days, we will examine the progress of energy contingency planning since the 1979 energy emergency. Of particular importance will be the examination of the implications of the free market approach, now national policy, in addressing energy contingency planning.