

Baltimore's Interstate Highway Project Receives Acceptance

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The 1970s have seen urban Interstate Highways blocked or slowed in many U.S. cities; however, Baltimore has proven that such projects can win political, environmental and community acceptance.

Baltimore's Interstate Program, referred to as the "3-A System" was developed by a multi-disciplinary urban design concept team in the late 1960s. The 32-mile system was developed in response to the fundamental regional planning goals of: Providing access to the Central Business District (CBD) without actually penetrating this sensitive core; providing vital access to the port (the single-most important economic element in the region); and diverting through traffic away from the Central Business District.

The "3-A System" satisfies these goals in the following manner: Access to the CBD from the north is provided via I-83; from the east via I-95 and I-395; and from the west via I-70 and I-170. Access to the port is provided via I-95, I-70 and I-83, while through traffic is diverted away from the CBD via I-95.

Since the Concept Team completed its work in 1970, the city, state, and FHWA have worked together in moving the system towards completion. The results of this effort are obvious. In the past seven years, sections requiring environmental approvals have been reduced by half, while the number of miles opened to traffic or under construction have doubled.

Approximately 40 percent of Baltimore's Interstate System is opened to traffic; about 30 percent is under construction or has cleared the environmental process, while the remaining 30 percent is being processed through the environmental requirements.

The city is actively pursuing the approval of this remaining 30 percent and has *not* deleted any section of its interstate program.

Approximately 360 million dollars of Interstate construction is currently underway in Baltimore City. This figure is expected to increase to approximately 750 million dollars in the next year when the

first contract for the 600 million dollar I-95 Fort McHenry Tunnel is awarded.

Why is Baltimore successful in moving its interstate program forward while other cities are not? There are three major reasons: A Mayor who is dedicated to completing a balanced transportation system which includes an interstate highway system, a mass transit system and improved bus service; the Mayor's mandate that the highway program be responsive to neighborhood concerns; and an excellent working relationship between the city, state and FHWA.

To assure cooperation, proper coordination and timely action, the state and city formed the Interstate Division for Baltimore City. This joint city/state agency is responsible for completing the Interstate Program within Baltimore City.

Its director is appointed by the State Highway Administrator, with the concurrence of the city. He reports to a city/state Policy Board made up of city and state officials.

Project planning is conducted by the Interstate Division. Following extensive coordination with affected communities and public and private organizations, recommendations regarding alternative selection are developed by the Interstate Division then reviewed and approved by the Mayor's Transportation Coordinating Committee. The Mayor's committee is composed of the City's Transportation Coordinator and department heads who are involved in the highway program.

The committee includes the heads of Finance, Recreation and Parks, Transit and Traffic, Housing and Community Development, Planning and Public Works.

This multi-disciplinary committee reviews Interstate Division recommendations from all perspectives, not merely transportation, and provides the Mayor with its recommendations. These are normally a compromise, which addresses as many of the concerns as possible, and results in decisions that are in the best overall interest of Baltimore and its citizens. Once approved by the Mayor, the

matter is forwarded to the city/state policy Advisory Board for its concurrence prior to submission to the FHWA. The Interstate Division keeps FHWA apprised of its progress throughout the planning process.

Initial planning work by the Interstate Division includes identifying community groups and others affected by a proposed project. The highway planners meet individually with each of the community organizations to discuss the proposed project. It is suggested that the communities appoint a small task force to work with the highway planners. At each stage of the planning process, informal presentations are made to each community task force. All presentations are conducted at the convenience of the community to insure maximum attendance.

The informal presentations include the need for the project along with the proposed alternatives, the advantages and disadvantages. Models, along with perspective drawings and highway plans are used to illustrate the various alternatives. The models are often constructed with lift-out sections to illustrate different alternatives; their construction sequence and methods. At each of the working sessions, a community can concentrate on the specific section of the project directly affecting it or on the total project. Ample time is spent discussing the problems identified by the Interstate Division or the community and possible solutions to the problems.

The community task force and the highway planners report back to the full community organization as required during the planning process. In this way, the community is kept constantly aware of progress. As a result of these informal working sessions, well thought out suggestions and comments have been received at the formal public hearings.

Each formal public hearing is preceded by an informational session held in each of the affected communities. These informational sessions summarize the results of the working sessions and include a presentation of the project planning to date, alternatives under consideration and the

impacts related to the alternatives. The presentation is of the multi-media type and utilizes three rear projection screens, nine to 16 slide projectors, and a recorded sound track. Slides are made of aerial photographs, models, perspective drawings and plans to visually and graphically depict the information being presented.

For example, when illustrating a particular alternative to a community, an aerial view is shown on the left screen, a model photograph of the alternative on the center screen and a perspective of the alternative on the right screen. This technique communicates the data in a simple and direct way. The multi-media presentation is followed by an informal question and answer session, usually held while the group is gathered around the model. The use of the model and perspective drawings have been invaluable in working with the communities.

The formal public hearings are held at a location that is near the proposed highway. The same multi-media presentation is given, but in this instance, it is followed by testimony for the record.

There is a complete effort by the Interstate Division to work with those affected. Noted concerns are given serious consideration and have resulted in major changes to the 3-A System in recent years. These changes include: Near Fort McHenry, Birthplace of our National Anthem, a proposed suspension bridge carrying I-95 over the harbor was placed around and to the south of the historic site; Interstate Route 395 was shifted and removed completely from an 18th century community—the Federal Hill Historic District; and to eliminate impact on the Fells Point area—an historic 18th century waterfront community, Interstate Route 83 was shifted southerly.

The City's willingness to make major adjustments to the "3-A System"—to protect the neighborhoods and their quality of life, has given the planning process credibility within the communities.

The following are examples illustrating Baltimore's approach to highway planning. Two of the examples concern the City Boulevard, an urban systems project, planned as an at-grade collector/distributor between I-395 and I-170 and the major east-west streets in the downtown area. The third example concerns I-395, a spur from I-95 that will provide access to the Central Business District. Both projects

are currently under construction and involved many working sessions with communities, public and private organizations and the State Historical Preservation Officer (SHPO)—thus assuring protection of affected communities, planned and continued development and the 35 historic sites identified in the project corridor.

One historical community is Ridgely's Delight, located at the southwestern edge of the Central Business District. It's composed of row homes mixed with larger buildings containing warehouses and light industry. Before adoption of the "3-A System" concept, uncertainty regarding highway construction in the area contributed to the decline of the community. Many of the houses had become vacant. To begin to revitalize the neighborhood, the City's Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) established Ridgely's Delight as an urban renewal area. Cooperation between HCD, the Community and the Interstate Division was exceptional.

Numerous "working sessions" resulted in shifting the boulevard away from the community and providing a landscaped buffer between the boulevard and the community. A two-acre park is being constructed on land adjacent to the community. This excess land was the result of a change in scope from an interstate to boulevard facility. This park includes landscaped berms with shrubs, ground cover and trees, a large open area for community activities, pedestrian walkways, brick screen walls, lighting and benches and other amenities consistent with the neighborhood.

Along with the highway planning effort, HDC worked with the community to rehabilitate the area. Many homes have now been renovated by their owners. The city has made improvements in the area and has encouraged others to invest in the neighborhood. A private developer is renovating and selling vacant houses to meet the increasing housing demand. The de-

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