

The Vision

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by Scott Bogren

"Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Proverbs 29:18

Vision. It implies foresight and an astute imagination. It demands an unwavering commitment. It suffers no fools. Vision. Some have it, some follow it, some are struck by it.

For us the question is: Who has the vision that plots community transportation's course into the 21st century?

At EXPO '98 in Albuquerque, N.M., we have asked all participants to Share the Vision . Yet as EXPO approached, I became aware that we at Community Transportation magazine had never fully revealed CTAA's vision -- the one in which we're inviting everyone to share. The following essay seeks not only to illuminate our objectives and aspirations as a collective field, but also to stimulate readers and EXPO participants alike to share their version of the vision. The end product will be a practical road map to our ultimate goal: access for all Americans.

In refining our vision, the process has come to mean nearly as much as the end result. For example, the process resulting in the Senate and House ISTEA reauthorization bills definitely serves to better define our vision. So, too, did the process of creating a set of policy resolutions at EXPO '97.

"Vision -- It reaches beyond the thing that is, into the conception of what can be. Imagination gives you the picture. Vision gives you the impulse to make the picture your own."

Robert Collier

In Fort Lauderdale, Fla., at last year's EXPO, the CTAA Board of Directors, State Delegates and general membership created a set of policy resolutions designed to enumerate the many virtues by which we all stand firm (check them out online). Some of these resolutions were specific to a singular issue, while others took a more global view. In detailing our vision, however, Resolution 1 is a good place to start. Under the title Community Transportation in the 21st Century , CTAA and its members commit themselves to maintaining and supporting a viable community

transportation system for the American people; pursuing the maximum funding levels for vital community transportation investments; and communicating the vital nature of community transportation programs to Congress, the Department of Transportation, the White House and other policy makers. As I said, a good start, but it merely breaks the surface.

Certainly, adequate funding is critical. The machinations of Congress in the past year indicate that funding for public transportation, overall, is on the rise. In these very pages, in fact, last September, we featured a grinning Winston Churchill signalling "V" for victory. In March, the Senate authorized record levels of funding for public transportation overall and rural transportation more specifically. Appropriations, however, are the key. Or are they?

In terms of defining the vision, recognition assuredly plays a vital role. And last month's congressional reauthorization bills bestow upon community transportation a level of respect and recognition heretofore unseen. Rural transit, access to jobs and small-urban transit all won deserving authorization victories, yet these true impact of these bills is still unknown.

Without question, community transportation has been vastly underfunded, unappreciated and unrecognized throughout its history. Doing more with less has become standard operating procedure. For our vision of community transportation to come to fruition might not take full funding, but it will require a recognition on the part of funders that a new paradigm for public transportation is set to take root. Indeed, recognition may not take full funding, but recognition is a necessity for full funding. Yet, as long as Congress and state legislatures hear conflicting stories from a fragmented mass transit network, increased funding may remain out of reach. The Senate's ISTEA II proposal represents a new transit coalition that has widespread support in non-traditional transit areas.

"Everyone takes the limits of his own vision for the limits of the world."

Arthur Schopenhauer

Choice is a key component of our vision for public transportation. People, be they senior citizens, school children, commuters or welfare recipients, need transportation alternatives that are responsive to their needs. The notion that there is only one way to go is obsolete. Because without adequate choices, people inevitably find themselves stranded and isolated. The experience of the past 100 years tells us that it takes a family of well-planned transportation modes to make a community fully mobile. Predictions for the future, including an aging population and the continued exodus from center cities, make expanding transit alternatives a must. Which leads us to flexibility.

The flexibility of community transportation systems is most certainly one of our greatest assets. Today, and well into the future, our vision mandates mobility that matches a community's needs. Flexibility is pivotal to this objective because people's needs constantly change. For example, commuting patterns shift. Population and destination densities have crept across the American landscape in the past 50 years in not so subtle ways rendering some public transportation systems ineffective at best.

Built into these notions of choice and flexibility is the end of the one-size-fits-all approach to public transportation. We envision a multitude of services provided by the successful community transportation agency of tomorrow. Bigger buses running along fixed routes during commute times; small demand-response type vans plying neighborhoods during the mid-day and evening shifts; rail services that coordinate with bus service in a meaningful way; and all working together at multi-modal transit centers. Service hours will extend to help workers in second and third shift jobs.

"We go where our vision is."

Bill Gates

Coordination has long been a buzzword in community transportation because it allows cash-strapped transit systems to increase their revenues. Our vision, however, is that coordination in the future will most benefit the transit passenger by making more transit choices available. In fact, our vision is one tied to collaboration more than coordination. For too long, coordination strategies have existed with the sole intention of helping transit agencies to do more with less. Collaboration, however, more aptly describes the ideal process of communication, asset sharing and problem solving that community transportation needs.

The idea of several virtually empty buses following one another down the road has always been the most compelling argument for collaboration. We think increasing overall mobility for all Americans is more compelling. Therefore, we would like to see collaboration efforts not take on the image of last-gasp efforts to make budgetary ends meet, instead they should streamline mobility for all the residents of a given community. Gone will be the senior bus, the school bus and the job shuttle van -- replaced by a seamless transportation service that contracts with schools, senior centers and nursing homes, suburban industrial parks and even shopping malls. Collaboration will create enhanced transit service for the passengers.

"Cherish your visions and your dreams as they are the children of your soul; the blue prints of your ultimate achievements."

Napoleon Hill

There are, of course, numerous facets to our vision of community transportation. Ideally, these facets are a reflection of yours; realistically, your vision includes items we have omitted. In developing this essay, I gave considered thought to the role of advanced technology and community transportation's economic development effect in enumerating our vision. In the end, however, I thought it best to focus our attention on the concepts of flexibility, choice, collaboration, funding and recognition.

Of course, we want to hear from you -- both at EXPO and beyond. For those readers in attendance at EXPO '98, take a long look at the policy resolutions we'll be asking you to ratify at the Closing Breakfast's membership meeting. Is your version of the vision covered. For readers not making the trek to Albuquerque, I invite you to write to me at 1341 G St., N.W., Ste. 600, Washington, DC 20005 or e-mail: bogren@ctaa.org .