

China Planning Network (CPN) CPN Urban Transport Congress

Beijing July 19, 2008

Keynote Speech Session Summary

Chair: Ralph Gakenheimer,

Professor of Urban Planning, MIT, Chair, International Scientific Committee of CODATU (Collaborative on Urban Transport Improvement in the Developing World)

KEYNOTE SPEECHES:

Bernard Cohen, Secretary of Transportation of Massachusetts. “Megatrends in US Transportation “

Robert Cervero, University of California at Berkeley, “Suburbanization and Transit Oriented Development in China”

This session attracted focused attention to the future of transportation in China, the problems and the possibilities. Secretary Cohen’s presentation, though dealing with issues in the United States, had many implications for the future of transportation in China. His recent experience directing the transport aspect of the recovery of Lower Manhattan from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 additionally informed the Chinese concern for the earthquake disaster in Sichuan and the general need for new infrastructure. Professor Cervero addressed the new, daunting challenge of suburbanization of the Chinese cities with evidence from his own research as well as evidence from other research, that close by rail transport makes an important difference in access to jobs for the, mostly not motorized, population of the Chinese suburbs.

Secretary Cohn began with an emphasis on the substantial payoff from giving serious attention to transportation—including urban transportation—during periods of rapid economic growth. The first of the megatrends he highlighted was the rising cost of fuel currently affecting the entire world. He pointed out that use of public transit has risen dramatically in the US as a result of the increased price of gasoline—an increase of 84.5 percent only during the last year. He pointed out that sales of heavy personal vehicles in the US have dramatically decreased. There is reason to expect similar consequences in China, and for the costs of fuel to continue at high levels. Therefore even the sale of new low cost vehicles, even such as the Tata offering for US\$2500, may be expected to slow down. The Chinese nation, which imports most of its gasoline, will be faced with strategies to avoid the loss of exchange. Middle-income people, as well as lower income families, will be dependent on public transport, increasing its priority in the economic development picture for China.

The second megatrend was the new environmental consciousness, raised at a very emphatic rate even during the last year in the United States. This concern is rising more slowly in China, especially on account of special preoccupation for recovery from the recent earthquake. It will also take its toll in China by encouraging less single occupant transport.

The Secretary also emphasized the deplorable state of transport infrastructure in the US and the strenuous means of financing its physical recovery as a third megatrend. This holds a lesson for China. US infrastructure has tended to be built in phases that have left recovery all at once to the present. Sanitary construction built in the 1890s that lasts just over 100 years, bridges built in the depression (1930s to provide employment) that last around 80 years, and highways by the Federal Interstate System built in the 70s that last 30 years. Everything due at once with little preparation in the US for rebuilding. China is building very large quantities of its infrastructure just now, all at once. The US lesson suggests the need to be prepared at the time when reconstruction will be due.

Population changes, a fourth megatrend, have some similarity between the two countries. Both are aging. That means more priority in urban transit that is user friendly to the elder generation. The funding picture suggests that for the long term (especially for maintenance and recovery of infrastructure) it is important to develop income sources from the infrastructure itself and private participation. Finally, as in the US, new technologies must be developed. There is need also in China to consider re-engineering the single-occupancy vehicle. Car sharing can be further developed to reduce the inclination of travel by single-occupancy vehicle, and also, incidentally, car sharing provides for occasional use by people whose income level does not permit them to own single-occupancy vehicles.

Professor Cervero's presentation was very persuasive in calling upon several research efforts, including his own, to indicate that when decentralizing populations are clustered in localities within a kilometer of metrorail (or other rapid systems of public transport) they are significantly more accessible to employment. Proximity to rail facilities also increase incentive to use efficient connector transportation, especially bicycle. Professor Cervero's evidence is very applicable to the practices of integrating transportation and land use planning. He has a very full background of studies in this area based on his studies of world cities' growth relationships with their respective transit systems and urban extensions across several decades. He has also considered in detail the problems of suburban mobility in the US as a consequence of wide, poorly focused urban housing decentralization.

Several of these points together suggest that clustering suburban development is efficient, and that this efficiency under circumstances of global warming concerns, aging population, and increasing infrastructure costs all suggest the need for greater focus on efficient transport through well managed urban development as a rapidly mounting priority.