

Transportation Break Out Group Notes

Group leaders:

- John Irons – Economics Policy Institute
- Elisa Ortiz – Smart Growth America

Participants:

- Matt Ryan – NY Jobs with Justice
- Reece Rushing – Center for American Progress
- Kevin Hsu – Opportunity Agenda
- Ryan Alexander – Taxpayers for Common Sense
- Leigh McIlvaine – Good Jobs First
- Yasmine Gabriel – NAACP Legal Defense Fund
- Francisca Porchas – Transit Riders for Public Transportation
- Kalima Rose – PolicyLink
- Adam Hughes – OMB Watch

Background:

- John and Elisa gave a short overview, talking about the law being a floor for requirements, not a ceiling and how the plan would work for the session.
- Elisa talked about the work that Smart Growth America is doing right now, with state, local, and national partners, on transportation issues, with three goals:
 - 1) affect the way transportation funding was spent within each state
 - 2) impact the conversation about stimulus funding on transportation to move the conversation away from non-highway toward public funding
 - 3) capacity-building for their network.
- SGA is releasing a state-by-state report on June 29 that shows how each state spent their funding from the stimulus – only the flexible funding stream, not highway or public transit funds – using these metrics:
 - 1) Highway new capacity (miles and percentage)
 - 2) Highway system preservation (miles and percentage)
 - 3) Non-motorized
 - 4) Transit related category
 - 5) Other (cats and dog category)
- EPI is working on broader stimulus analysis, but they are looking at the number and kind of jobs that are created, and are trying to figure out what those jobs look like, including wages, union status, race, gender, etc.
- PolicyLink is trying to get better data on jobs and other factors that EPI is looking at and is involved in the Smart Growth America project. They are also focused on job training and other factors that will help to move hard to employ populations into these new jobs, particularly green jobs.
- Transit Riders working to fight mass transit agency in Los Angeles from cutting service hours and other cut backs, which is refusing to spend the stimulus money to prevent these cuts.
- GJF isn't focused directly on transportation policy, but interested in leveraging the transportation/construction issue to learn more information about contractors and their spending and performance.

- TCS has been working on watchdog role, particularly on transportation earmarks, and is trying to show the difference between shovel-ready and “good” transportation projects (which aren’t always the same thing).
- Talked about the additional reporting requirements that could be requested, which already exist in other federal laws, including Titles 6 and 7, the ADA, the Davis-Bacon Act, and the Age Discrimination and Employment Act.
- Lengthy conversation about other federal requirements for non-discrimination and compliance with race, age, union, etc discrimination – particularly focusing on whether this is a “reporting” requirement or just a federal mandate.

Current Requirements in ARRA:

- State DOTs have to report to Federal DOT:
 - 1) Amount of money spent on projects (appropriated, obligated, paid out)
 - 2) Total number of projects (the number of contracts put out to bid, have been awarded, have begun, and have been completed)
 - 3) Total number of jobs created (direct on-project jobs created/sustained, indirect number of jobs created/sustained, total job years, total increase in employment since date of enactment)
 - 4) Whether Recovery Act money substituted for planned spending.

What Everyone Wants Beyond the Law

- First, and most basically, information should be reported in a common, machine-readable format (NOT PDF).
- Then, there is the specific contract data which we need, such as zip code or Census tract, as well as employee information, like union status, apprenticeship status, and wage rate, and information on the company, such as location (where the company is based), size, and minority or gender status.
- The group discussed how we should measure the outcome of these projects, using figures such as timely completion, miles paved, time traveled (on roads), the number and characteristics of people served, and whether safety and environmental statistics improve.
- Should the government be focusing on fixing old things or building new things?
- Information on whether the Recovery is meeting unmet needs.
- Data on whether it is reducing isolation/increasing job access.
- Money should be able to be used for operational activities, not just for capital expenditures.
- There should also be a breakdown of spending/activity across transportation modes, such as highways, transit, air, water, etc.
- John talks about ways in which one can measure job creation, such as how the Administration is doing it (money spent = jobs created) versus more rigorous methods, such as using industry data.
- Is measuring job hours a way of getting closer to answering the equity questions that people are most interested in?
- The group settled on three main categories to focus on: Location, Who’s being served, Who is being employed/contracted with.

What are we going to do with the information?:

- The data should be displayed in a report with standardized data fields across the states, in computer-readable formats (APIs, ATOM, feeds, etc).
- There should be access to the raw data, without filtering or influencing of data, so that those at the state and local level can use the information.

- An emphasis should be placed on the localization of the data: zip codes should be on everything, as well as GPS, which would lead to more sophisticated analysis.
- The raw data should be able to be linked up to other data sets, such as the outcome metrics.
- The government should be using the data to create visualizations, and using them to connect to other government data sets.

Suggestions/Ideas:

- Should the government use wikis to allow other to contribute to the data quality and presentation conversation?
- Should the government integrate advocacy tools into the data reporting systems? This would help with organizing and information sharing.
- Implement these ideas with a pilot program first, and have review measures in the pilot to be able to build up the program slowly so it works well.