

CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS FOR THEME E
THE FUTURE HUMAN AND TRANSPORT ENVIRONMENT

M.G. Lay

In my opening remarks to the Conference I said it was proper that the organisers should have devoted some time for a serious discussion of the future. I am pleased to now report that such discussion has taken place. Let me now personally survey that discussion.

We saw that transport was an all-pervasive part of our lives and that our need for travel flowed from our life pattern and our economic performance. For example, John Rickleffs claimed that the reconstruction of the US transport sector was an essential prerequisite for the resurgence of the US economy.

In predicting the future, we first looked at the past and saw the dramatic effects of changes that had occurred - containerisation in shipping, information technology in scheduling, allocation and booking and motorisation on urban growth. It was therefore suggested that there was historical evidence that our future transport would be much influenced by technological change and the major discontinuities associated with that change.

We noted that non-transport factors were usually critical in our transport decision-making and that future transport forms would depend on issues beyond transport. For example, we noted the current impact of the economic recession. Peter Linsdorf showed us that forecasts made as recently as 1978 now look decidedly optimistic. We saw that it was not the steady trend that should concern us - rather it was the cataclysmic unexpected event - the oil crisis, economic recession and heightened environmental pressures. What is the next dramatic change and how do we prepare for it?

We saw that we needed to be flexible and not close future options.

We noted the critical nature of transport investments and the long tradition of government involvement in that investment. The continuance of this situation was queried, as was the continuing usage of transport to subsidise social and economic issues seen to inhibit the attainment of a rational future. One of our speakers described much of our transport investment as pyramid building.

Particularly, Dr Holst reported that the fragmented nature of transport planning in Europe was also reflected on a world scale. International comparative assessment is impossible.

We were also reminded that we should not complain about government and its policies. Martin Mogridge noted that, whilst all the relevant policies for controlling the car were government policies, it was up to us as individuals to choose the future. The decision, he said, was in our hands.

Meyer Hillman noted how the greatest hurdles to improvement were often well intended barriers that we had adopted for other reasons.

Our papers from the developing countries also made it clear that transport problems do not need to be solved by high investment solutions. The western world tends to ignore this fact and sees massive civil construction as the only solution, but the fact remains that the world's profitable public transport operators are usually small scale private entrepreneurs. Perhaps there is a lesson for the rest of us here.

We noted - of course - the revolution in telecommunications and IT. That this was happening independently of the transport community. We saw a natural tendency for transport specialists to predict that telecom and IT would not affect them. But these specialists were inevitably going to be proved wrong.

Telecom and IT had no distance or location dependency. Separation of activities in space were becoming increasingly irrelevant. Telecom was flexible and adaptive. It was not oil dependent. It had a quite different management structure. Through guidance technology it could be used to produce an "electronic" railroad. But, it would not create travel substitution. This was not our prediction. Rather it would create a new world. Dr Solomon in another theme explored the ramifications of this.

We saw a slow future growth in freight movement as GNP growths increased slowly and as the value per tonne of the products we shipped increased - more value, less volume. We saw road transport with its greater flexibility and adaptability and opportunity for major electronic inputs, continuing to erode other transport markets. We saw major future changes in car types - w.r.t. to engines, size, telecom controls and in-built intelligence. Vehicle size would decrease further and the concepts of electronic convoys and electronic chauffeurs were advanced for systems that would produce better use in decision making, e.g. by more direct pricing, which would sometimes result in what would currently be seen as counter-intuitive decisions.

We saw the impact of many of the changes put ahead of us being first in the commercial rather than the private sector, due to a relatively slow rate of diffusion of the technologies into the private sector. Indeed, we saw that many traditional and human preferences - e.g. the need to touch the apples in the supermarket - would retain a more simple technology in some domestic activities. Others, however, would change dramatically as global markets in knowledge and resources were opened to all.

To repeat, we strongly opposed the idea of direct travel substitution by telecom, but did see major effects on any predictions of future change and of new workplace decision making. As Professor Meyburg said, travel is a reflection of our economic activity and lifestyles. We therefore needed to carefully consider the interplay between transport and communications to better understand the consequences of our action.

We saw a need for future urban planning to be more flexible and to increase the possibility of such easy travel modes as walking and bicycling. Land use would remain a key to much of what we did - but the future interactions between transport and land use would, as Professor Westerman noted, be more dynamic.

The supply of transport energy would continue as a critical issue and - although we might be technological optimists - no easy solutions other than draconian pricing were as yet obvious. We could do well to watch the successes and the trials and tribulations of Brazil. We needed to be much more conscious of the energy efficiency of the transport forms we were using. Currently our systems were too riddled with subsidisation and cross-subsidisation for efficiency to prevail. As Professor Dalvi noted, although we are currently more relaxed about energy supplies, in the long term the problem remains a serious one.

We concluded that the future will need flexibility and adaptability - both in our transport systems but, more critically, in our thinking and acting.