

# **Public Transit System Policy Boards: Organization and Characteristics**

**Prepared for:**

**Transit Cooperative Research Program**

**TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD  
OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES**

**Submitted by:**

**SIMON & SIMON Research and Associates, Inc.  
Elkridge, MD**

**In conjunction with**

**Will Scott & Associates, LLC  
Prangley & Company  
Group Dimensions**

**May 2002**

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

This work was sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and was conducted through the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP), which is administered by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) of the National Academies.

### **DISCLAIMER**

The opinions and conclusions expressed or implied in the report are those of the research agency. They are not necessarily those of the TRB, the National Research Council, the FTA, the Transit Development Corporation, or the U.S. Government.

**This report has not been edited by TRB.**

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

SUMMARY

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, E-1**

Research Methodology, E-1

Research Findings, E-3

Suggestions for Additional Research, E-11

### **CHAPTER 1 Introduction and Research Approach, 1**

Statement of the Problem, 1

Research Methodology, 3

### **CHAPTER 2 Review of the Literature, 11**

Board Organization and Composition, 11

Board Role and Responsibilities, 20

Characteristics of an Effective Board, 22

Summary, 25

### **CHAPTER 3 Findings, 29**

Part I National Transit CEO and Board Chair Study, 29

Transit System Characteristics, 31

Transit Board Chair Characteristics, 36

Organization and Composition of Boards, 40

Structure and Practices of Transit Boards, 57

Board Roles and Duties, 75

Board Effectiveness, 82

Part II Transit Board Focus Groups, 99

Characteristics of Effective Public Transit Board Members, 100

Characteristics of an Effective Board, 107

Measures to Assess Board Effectiveness, 112

Part III Case Studies, 115

### **CHAPTER 4 Summary and Conclusions, 147**

Conclusions, 147

Summary of Findings, 147

Suggestions for Additional Research, 159

**REFERENCES, R-1**

**APPENDIX A      Sample Survey Letters, A-1**

**APPENDIX B      Transit General Manager/CEO Questionnaire, B-1**

**APPENDIX C      Transit Board Chair Questionnaire, C-1**

**APPENDIX D      List of Respondent Transit Systems, D-1**

## **Acknowledgments**

The research reported herein was performed under TCRP Project H-24 by SIMON & SIMON Research and Associates, Incorporated in conjunction with Will Scott & Associates, LLC, Prangley & Company and Group Dimensions. SIMON & SIMON Research and Associates, Incorporated was the contractor for this study.

Rosalyn M. Simon was the principal investigator. Research team members include: Monica Simon, SIMON & SIMON; Will Scott, Jackie Davison, Will Scott & Assoc.; Bob Prangley, Steve Delguidice, Prangley & Co.; and Janet Billson and Norman London of Group Dimensions.

The work was done under the general supervision of Rosalyn Simon. The work at Will Scott & Assoc. was under the supervision of Will Scott with the assistance of Jackie Davison. The work at Prangley & Co. was under the supervision of Bob Prangley with the assistance of Steve Delguidice. The work at Group Dimensions was under the supervision of Janet Billson with the assistance of Norman London.

## **Abstract**

This report documents and presents the findings of a study of the organization and characteristics of public transit boards. A search of related literature was completed to identify characteristics and organization of governance boards in the public transit industry. A national survey was conducted to identify the state of the art in the organization, characteristics and effectiveness of contemporary public transit boards. Surveys were mailed to transit CEOs and transit board chairs in over 300 public transit systems. A total of 254 completed surveys were returned representing a 50 percent response rate. Five focus groups to discuss transit board effectiveness were held in conjunction with the APTA Transit Board Seminar in Denver, Colorado in July 2001. A total of 83 board members and support staff participated in the focus groups. Case studies were conducted at six transit systems to provide further insight on the operation of transit boards: Downeast Transportation Inc., Ellsworth, Maine; Kenosha Transit, Kenosha, Wisconsin; Regional Transit District, Denver, Colorado; Salem Area Mass Transit District, Salem, Oregon, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and The Fort Worth Transportation Authority, Ft. Worth, Texas. Research results reported data and information on the characteristics, organization and operation of public transit boards, characteristics of effective board members, effective boards, and measures to assess transit board effectiveness.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Public transit boards vary in terms of characteristics, selection methods, duties, roles, and powers. Little is written about how they operate, and limited information is available to define and describe transit board effectiveness. This research was undertaken to address these issues. The purpose of this study was to provide national data and information on public transit board governance and the nature and characteristics of transit board effectiveness.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To achieve the study's objectives, three methods of data collection were used

- National survey of transit chief executive officers/ general managers and board chairs
- Focus groups with board members on support staff effectiveness
- Case studies of six selected public transit boards

### ***National Survey***

A national survey of transit chief executive officers (CEOs) and board chairpersons was conducted to identify board powers, role, responsibilities, size, structure, organization, composition and perceptions of board effectiveness.

The survey was administered to the entire population of U. S. public transit systems that are members of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), as listed in the

2000 edition of the APTA Directory. Outreach to the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) yielded an additional listing of small, rural transit systems. A total of 334 surveys were sent to transit CEOs/general managers and 175 to transit board chairs. (New board chairs had replaced 29 percent of the chairpersons as listed in the directory, and in the transition, many surveys were not forwarded). A total of 177 responses were received from transit CEOs, representing a response rate of 53 percent. Board chairs returned 77 surveys, representing a response rate of 44 percent. Collectively these surveys yielded information on 213 transit systems.

The survey response represents a 50 percent return rate of the surveys distributed and 52 percent of the public transit systems that are APTA members. These systems range in size from those serving populations of over 1 million to areas with populations less than 50,000.

### ***Transit Board Focus Groups***

Five focus groups on transit board effectiveness were held with transit board members and board support staff during the APTA Transit Board Seminar in Denver, Colorado in July 2001. A total of 83 individuals, 45 transit board members and 38 board support staff, participated in the focus groups.



## ***Case Studies***

Six case studies were conducted at the following transit systems to provide additional insight on the operation of transit boards:

- Downeast Transportation, Inc., Ellsworth, Maine
- Fort Worth Transportation Authority, Ft. Worth, Texas
- Kenosha Transit, Kenosha, Wisconsin
- Regional Transit District, Denver, Colorado
- Salem Area Mass Transit District, Salem, Oregon.
- Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The study produced the following key research findings.

### **Organization and Composition of Transit Boards**

#### ***Selection Method***

Appointment to the transit board by elected officials was the most common board selection method. Publicly elected boards accounted for only three percent of the responses. The types of board selection methods reported include:

- Appointment by elected officials
- Appointment by non-elected officials
- Appointment by joint powers authorities
- Elected official boards
- Mixed boards
- Publicly elected boards
- Transportation advisory boards

### ***Size***

The average board is comprised of nine members.

### ***Length of Board Terms***

Most board members serve terms of three or four years.

### ***Demographics***

The majority of transit boards are comprised of White males. The male-female ratio on transit boards is 3:1. Approximately 50 percent of the respondents reported having at least one African-American board member. About 25 percent reported having at least one Hispanic board member. Only five percent reported having at least one Asian board member, and one transit system reported having one Native American board member.

Approximately one-fourth (24%) of the transit systems reported one board member with a disability.

## **Structure and Practices of Transit Boards**

### ***New Member Orientation***

Ninety percent of the respondent board chairs said that they received some form of new member orientation, though usually informal and unstructured.

### ***Meetings***

Monthly board meetings are the norm in the respondent transit boards.

### ***Committee Structure***

Most boards use a committee structure. The most common standing committees are Executive, Finance/Budget, Human Resources, Planning, Legislative/Government Relations and Marketing. Ad hoc committees usually meet on an as needed basis.

## ***Compensation***

The majority of board members are not compensated for their time or reimbursed for expenses associated with their board participation. Only 31 out of 213 transit systems compensate board members for their time or reimburse expenses for board service. When board members do receive compensation, it is most likely to be \$50.00 per full board meeting.

## ***Administrative Support***

Most boards have regular but not necessarily full-time administrative support; the most common source is the CEO/GM's own administrative staff.

## **Transit Board Roles and Duties**

Eighty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that their role is strictly policy setting, not managing day-to-day operations. In most systems, the primary board activities involve budget approval, CEO selection and establishing organizational priorities. The most time consuming responsibilities were identified as establishing organizational priorities, service policies and standards, budget approval, strategic planning, and fiscal oversight.

The leadership of the board chair was considered very important. However, chairs described their role as “a facilitator” who moderates meetings and helps the board to

work effectively. Board chairs are usually the primary spokesperson and liaison with the CEO and appointing bodies.

## **Transit Board Effectiveness**

### ***Assessments***

The majority of transit systems do not measure board effectiveness. Of those that do measure effectiveness, it is usually an annual informal self-assessment.

### ***Ratings of Effectiveness***

Most CEOs rated their boards as *very effective* on political support; *effective* on funding, planning, transit image and professionalism; and *somewhat effective* on ridership growth. The majority of CEOs and board chairs rated their boards as *effective* on overall transit governance. Board chair ratings were: ridership growth, *somewhat effective*, political support, *very effective*. Funding, planning, transit image and professionalism were rated as *effective*.

### ***Influences on Effectiveness***

Leadership provided by the transit CEO/General Manager has a strong to very strong influence on how the board operates. No significant differences exist in CEO and board

chairperson ratings of influence items. They agree substantially that commitment is very important and compensation is least important.

Both groups viewed the board's receipt of timely information to have a strong influence on board effectiveness. Clarity of role, clarity of management expectations, and board member's knowledge of transit also had a strong influence. Least important was board orientation.

### ***Improving Transit Board Effectiveness***

CEOs suggestions for improving board effectiveness include: measuring performance and finding ways to enhance board member commitment and time allotted for board work; improving board composition and structure by broadening diversity and streamlining committee structures; engaging in strategic and long-range planning; and improving information, communication, and knowledge.

Board chairpersons suggested that board effectiveness could be improved if individuals were more diverse, more committed, and had better knowledge of transit. They also suggested that boards should have more autonomy and authority, as well as better communication with external agencies.

### ***Characteristics of Effective Board Members***

The following characteristics were identified as characteristics of effective board members:

- Advocate for the Community
- Committed to Public Transit
- Focused
- Knowledgeable
- Open Communication
- Political
- Prepared
- Team Player/Consensus Builder
- Understand the Board's Role

### ***Characteristics of Effective Transit Boards***

The following were identified as characteristics of effective transit boards:

- Achieves Goals
- Assesses Progress
- Balanced

- Cohesive Group
- Commitment
- Educates
- Focuses On Policy
- Good Communication
- Good Relationship with CEO
- Helps to Improve Transit System Performance
- Increases Revenue
- Knowledgeable
- Politically Astute
- Strategic
- Strong Chair

### ***Measures to Assess Transit Board Effectiveness***

According to the research results, the following criteria should be considered when evaluating transit board effectiveness:

- Achieves Strategic Goals
- Appearance of Equipment



- Balanced Budget
- Increased Ridership
- Labor/Management Relationship
- Meets Community Public Transit Needs
- Morale/Attitudes of Employees
- Public Opinion of Board and Transit System
- Quality of Transit Service
- Reputation with Media
- Revenue
- Transit System Performance
- Working Relationship among Board Members
- Working Relationship with General Manager/CEO and Other Staff

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH**

The following suggestions for further study are provided to address several of the issues raised in this research effort.

### **Expanded Transit CEO/Board Chair Survey**

In order to obtain an even more definitive understanding of the operation of public transit boards nationwide, a comprehensive survey of the entire population of U.S.

public transit systems could be conducted. The research would request responses from all CEOs and transit board chairs to examine the characteristics organization and board practices. Particular attention would be paid to perceptions and ratings of transit board effectiveness.

### **Survey Appointing Bodies and Customers**

The responses of this study are limited to those of the Transit CEOs, board chairs and support staff. To obtain a more balanced perspective, similar research could be conducted with the appointing bodies and customers who use the services.

### **Develop Assessment Tool to Evaluate Effectiveness**

Using the baseline data, information, perceptions and suggested measures for determining transit board effectiveness, research should be conducted to develop and test an assessment instrument.

### **Orientation and Training**

A best practices manual is needed to provide information and suggestions for developing comprehensive and meaningful orientation sessions for new board members. Training and dissemination strategies should be designed to ensure wide dissemination in the industry.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH APPROACH**

This report presents the results of a comprehensive literature review, national survey of public transit system chief executive officers (CEOs) and board chairs, transit board focus groups and case studies of six selected transit boards. The research was intended to identify the organization and characteristics of public transit policy boards and document perceptions of characteristics and measures to assess transit board effectiveness. The compilation and synthesis of these data formed the framework of a transit board reference document to provide guidance on transit board governance.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Board governance is a prominent part of public administration. Based on the theory that a group of citizens appointed or elected for a specified period of time can best represent the public interest, policy boards are an important part of public-sector activities. Though widely accepted at every level of government, little empirical information exists on the organization and characteristics of public policy governance boards. Governance boards are usually created as part of legislation establishing a public organization; but

because there is no model legislation, board organization and characteristics vary greatly. A board of directors usually governs public transit systems; but even less information is available about the characteristics and structure of public transit boards. For the most part, the information available is extrapolated from the practices of private sector and private, non-profit governance boards.

Public transit boards vary in terms of characteristics, selection methods, duties, roles, and powers. The collaboration of transit general managers/executive officers and board members is vital to the effectiveness of transit agencies, but because so little is written about how they operate, there is often misunderstanding about the critical role of the board and particularly how it differs from management. The roles of board governance and management are often blurred and the distinction between oversight and interference is unclear. Limited, if any, information is available to public transit executives and board members seeking such a clarification. Similarly, there is a dearth of information to define and describe transit board effectiveness. Such information is needed to assess board performance and to assist transit executives who desire to consolidate or change the structure of their boards to improve their effectiveness.

This study was intended to provide national data and information on public transit board governance and the nature and characteristics of transit board effectiveness. To achieve the study's objectives, three methods of data collection were used

- National survey of transportation agency general managers/chief executive officers and board chairs
- Focus groups with transit board members on transit board effectiveness
- Case studies of six selected public transit boards

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The initial step in the process was to introduce the research goals, objectives and methodology to the Transit Board Committee of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) at the APTA Annual Meeting in San Francisco in September 2000. The presentation included an introduction of the research team and an overview of the project. The Board members offered their assistance in encouraging members to complete and return surveys and agreed to pre-test the draft questionnaire.

The next step was to conduct a comprehensive review of literature on public policy boards. Computerized searches were conducted using relevant library, university, and industry databases such as the Transportation Research Board Information Service, American Public Transportation Association, Community Transportation Association of America, U.S. Department of Transportation Library, and National Center for Non-Profit Boards. The review focused on synthesizing literature on the organization, structure, characteristics, roles and responsibilities of effective public policy boards. Emphasis was placed on literature pertaining to board governance in public transportation systems; however, limited published research specific to the transit industry was found. In addition to providing background information for the study, the literature review was also used to guide the research and to develop the survey questionnaires.

## **National Transit CEO and Board Chair Study**

A national survey of transit Chief Executive Officers (CEOs)<sup>1</sup> and board chairpersons was conducted to identify board powers, role, responsibilities, size, structure, organization, and composition. The research collected information on selection methods, compensation, term length, and committee structure of transit boards.” The survey also queried transit CEOs and board members about perceptions of board effectiveness.

To ensure responses from the full range of public transit systems, the survey was administered to the entire population of U. S. public transit systems that are APTA, as listed in the 2000 edition of the organization’s directory. Mailing labels for transit CEOs and board chairs were provided by APTA. To ensure adequate representation by small and rural transit systems, the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) provided an additional list of transit systems.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term “CEO” is used throughout this report in order to avoid confusion among various administrative/executive titles used by respondents and to avoid inadvertently identifying any respondent by title. Analysis of respondent titles shows the following usages (in alphabetical order): Administrator; CEO; CEO/Executive Director; CEO/General Manager; CEO/President; Chairman; Director; Director of Office of Management and Budget; Director of Operations; Director of Surface Transportation; Director of Transit Services; Director of Transportation; Executive Director; General Manager; Manager; Manager of Transportation; Managing Director; President; Public Transit Director; Public Transportation Director; Senior Executive Assistant; Transit Administrator; Transit Director; Transit Division Manager; Transit General Manager; Transit Manager; Transportation Coordinator; Transportation Manager; Vice President; and Vice President of Administration/CFO. These titles included interim, assistant, and acting designations.

## **Survey Questionnaire**

The research team developed a survey questionnaire for transit general managers/executive officers (CEOs) and a parallel version of the questionnaire for transit board chairpersons to collect the following information:

- Transit system characteristics, i.e., mode, service area, type of community served, fleet size, and funding source.
- Information about board chairs, such as position on the board, initial placement on the board, length of board service, motivation for serving, employment status, familiarity with public transportation, and personal ridership patterns.
- Descriptions of transit boards such as size, structure, meeting frequency, compensation, and role of the board chair
- Descriptions of board role, duties and perceptions of board effectiveness.

## **Data Collection**

The questionnaires were pre-tested with randomly selected transit CEOs and members of the APTA Transit Board Committee. Both versions were revised and produced in print and interactive electronic format. The questionnaire was forwarded whenever possible via electronic mail to each transit CEO and board chair. The electronic respondents were broken into several subgroups in order to avoid address failure. A survey was mailed to respondents who did not list an e-mail address in the APTA or CTAA databases. Respondents could submit their forms via electronic mail, but a print version of the questionnaire was available by request. A total of 372 surveys were sent

to transit CEOs; and 187 surveys were sent to board chairs during December 2000 and January 2001. After correcting for duplicates, address changes, and CEO and board chair changes (29% of board chairs has been replaced by other individuals) revisions to the database were made, yielding a final database of 334 CEOs and 175 board chairs.

## **Response Rate**

To facilitate an adequate response rate and easy access, several strategies were employed:

- A cover letter signed by the principal investigator and chair, APTA Transit Board Committee accompanied all surveys.
- Reminder post cards or e-mail messages were sent two to four weeks after the initial survey distribution.
- Follow-up e-mail messages and telephone calls were made to secure responses from each non-respondent during the data collection period. A second set of surveys was faxed to non-respondents.
- An article, extending the survey deadline, was prepared and published in the January 29, 2001 issue of Passenger Transport.

A total of 177 responses were received from transit CEOs, representing a response of rate of 53 percent. Board chairs returned 77 surveys, representing a response rate of 44 percent. Response data is presented in Table 1.



---

**Table 1**

**Survey Response Rate**

**N=509**

---

<b>Questionnaire</b>	<b>Mailed</b>	<b>Returned</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
CEO	334	177	53%
Board Chair	175	77	44%
Total	509	254	50%

---

**Matched Pairs**

In forty-one transit systems, both the general manager and board chair completed survey questionnaires. Therefore, the research findings represent the responses of 213 public transit systems.

**Data Analysis**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to report survey frequencies and explore the interrelationships among system fleet size, region, mode, board characteristics, board structure, roles, and perceptions of effectiveness.

Significance levels were computed on appropriate variables. Qualitative data were compiled to determine recurring themes and highlight unique responses or insights.

Cross-tabulation of variables is reported only for positive associations.

## **Focus Groups**

To supplement the survey data, focus groups were held with transit board members and board support staff to identify the characteristics of and measures to assess the effectiveness of public transit boards. Data collected from the survey formed the basis for the discussion on transit board effectiveness.

Five focus groups were held with transit board members and board support staff during the APTA Transit Board Seminar in Denver, Colorado in July 15-17, 2001. Four groups were scheduled and an additional session was held at the request of the Board Support Group.

Sixty (60) transit board members were selected from the APTA conference registration list. Each received an invitational letter to attend one of three transit board member focus groups. All letters were followed-up with a telephone call. Board support staff who participated were attendees at the APTA Board Support Group Business Meeting. The focus groups were well attended and enthusiastically received. Participation was diverse in terms of transit system size, geographical location, and length of board service, gender, race, and individuals with disabilities. A total of 83 individuals, 45 transit board members and 38 board support staff, participated in the focus groups.

## **Case Studies**

The study team conducted six case studies to provide additional insight on the operation of transit boards by capturing the views of as many board members as possible during the board visit. Case study selections was based on the following criteria:

- Geographical Location
- Mode
- Size and Type of Community
- Board Selection Method
- Board Composition
- Dedicated Funding Source

The following transit systems were selected for an in depth analysis of board governance:

- Downeast Transportation, Incorporated, Ellsworth, Maine
- (The) Fort Worth Transportation Authority, Ft. Worth, Texas
- Kenosha Transit, Kenosha, Wisconsin
- Regional Transit District in Denver, Colorado
- Salem Area Mass Transit District, Salem, Oregon.
- Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The visits coincided with the regularly scheduled board meeting of each system. The interviews lasted one hour or less and the focus group was for a period of 45 minutes.

The purpose of the visit was to: (1) observe a transit agency board meeting, (2) conduct a focus group with the board members, and (3) conduct interviews with the board chairperson and the CEO of the transit system. The interview and focus group questions concentrated on the following facets of the board and its members:

- Occupation of board members
- Length of time on board
- Understanding of their role as a board member
- Adequacy of board orientation and training
- Perception of duties, role and powers
- Commitment to the work of the board
- Adequacy of transit system resources/communication/support
- Perception of board effectiveness

### **Organization of The Report**

In addition to the Summary and Introduction, the report contains three additional chapters and appendices. Chapter 2 presents the main findings from the literature review. Chapter 3 presents the findings of national survey, focus groups and case studies. Chapter 4 presents conclusions and suggestions for future research. Copies of the survey questionnaires and other relevant information are included in the Appendices.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, boards and commissions were placed in charge of public sector activities to improve policy-making and administration as part of the “good government movement” (1). To make the public sector more democratic and competent, groups of citizens were appointed to governing bodies to represent the public interest. Currently, public policy boards are an important part of government, and control many of the nation’s airports, hospitals, housing authorities, sports stadiums, universities and transit systems (1). Though public policy boards are commonplace in transit today, there is a paucity of empirical research on public transit policy boards. As a result of finding little published research specific to the transportation industry, this chapter reviews the available literature on the composition, organization, structure and effectiveness of public transit policy boards, and includes a review of relevant *corporate* governance literature.

### **BOARD ORGANIZATION AND COMPOSITION**

Governance boards are usually created as part of legislation establishing a public organization to provide counsel and balance to the management team. The legislation sets forth the method for selecting members, terms of office, board size and composition, compensation and general responsibilities of the members. In some instances, no governance board is required.

The use of public transit policy boards dates back to the passage of the Urban Mass Transit Act of 1964. A shift from private ownership to public governance became the paradigm for public transportation when states and regions enacted legislation to establish *transit authorities* or *transit districts*. Transit boards became the legal governing bodies of these newly formed public transit systems.

*All power and authority granted to a regional authority shall be vested in and exercised by its board of trustees which manage and conduct its affairs (2, p. 6).*

With the existing diversity in transit size, type, geographic location, etc., the legislation leaves the organization and characteristics of the board to each system. As a result, boards and their specific characteristics vary from system to system.

### **Board Selection Methods**

In the early years of corporate governance, the board was comprised of “inside” directors<sup>2</sup> and looked upon as a subsidiary of management. “*Board service had a symbolic status, token compensation, and women or minorities were seldom included.*” However, during the 1980’s as corporate boards found themselves under investigation for failing to ask questions of management and becoming lax in their duties (3), board selection processes were restructured to select directors based on the needs of the organization, not for politics (4). When selecting board members, corporations consider

---

<sup>2</sup> An “inside” director is an individual who is a present or former employee, or has a significant financial or personal interest in the organization.

the expertise and knowledge of each director and the contribution they can make to the board as a whole (4). Corporations are looking for board members with integrity, intuition, vision, and the ability to think strategically and handle conflict, the capacity to make effective decisions, and good interpersonal skills (5). In 1994, General Motors issued a 28-point *GM Board Guidelines on Significant Corporate Governance Issues*. A major provision of the guidelines stipulates that, *the board has basic responsibility for the selection of its own members* (6). Directors should represent *a balance of understanding in markets, finance, technology, research and the operation of a company* (7).

The selection process for transit board directors varies from organization to organization, however, the predominant method is appointment by a local or state elected official. Sometimes, approval is also required from the local legislative body (state legislature, city council). According to Horn (8), the earliest boards were appointed by local elected officials representing the political entities that established the transit authority. Members typically represented specific political jurisdictions, and appointing entities were governors, mayors, city councils or regional jurisdictions. Results of this study revealed that only two out of the 37 board respondents were publicly elected. Horn concluded that personal acquaintance with the appointee by the local elected official appeared to be a factor in appointment. Subsequent research supports appointment by elected officials as the predominant trend in transit board selection methods (1), (8), (9), (10).

## **Board Composition**

Each transportation system has different needs and the board should reflect those needs. Research revealed that transit board members were primarily drawn from business and political circles (8), (11). A synthesis of 30 transit boards, conducted by the Transportation Research Board (TRB), reported that forty percent of the board members were from the banking and business community (2). At that time, only eight percent of the members were elected officials. In another study, one of the respondent transit boards was comprised of ten members; nine of the members were businessmen and lawyers. Most researchers attribute this pattern to financial and political concerns that facilitated the need for “a power elite” board of the most successful business and civic leaders (9). More recently, researchers suggest that political and civic leaders should be appointed to the board because they can represent the views of transit and business leaders (11).

Board members are also selected to bring the experience and perspective of a particular group or segment of the constituency. Therefore, diversity in gender and ethnic minorities should be considered. In the corporate arena, seventy-two percent of governance boards report at least one female director. Fifty-five percent of corporate boards also report an ethnic minority member (12). Early in the establishment of public transit systems, UMTA encouraged the appointment of women and minorities to transit boards (8). In the mid-1970's, a large U.S. transportation system increased the number of board members to represent a more heterogeneous board and included four African-



Americans and two female members (9). During this period, the total minority representation on boards was 29 percent and 16 percent female representation (8).

### **Board Length of Terms**

In the Paaswell survey of 39 transit systems, 26 percent of the board members were appointed for two-year periods; 23 percent were appointed for four-years; 18 and percent were appointed for 5 years. The remainder of the boards members were appointed for either three or one-year periods. Ten percent of the respondents reported no fixed terms of appointment (11). According to George, a corporate board's length of term can be based on age limit or maximum number of years or both. He recommends that board terms be limited to age 70 or three to five years (13). George stated that limiting the length of term allows for fresh ideas and critical thinking.

### **Board Size**

Over the past few years, the size of corporate boards has decreased. The average size for public Fortune 1000 companies is now eleven (7). Transit board composition and constituency representation may have changed over the years, but board size has remained consistent over the past 25 years. Board size ranges from 5 to 23 members, but the average number of members on transit boards is nine (2), (8). Paaswell reported an average board size of ten members (11). The importance of board size is related to its interests and decision-making style (1). Large boards may increase the viewpoints, which may slow the pace of decision-making and limit the discussion of key issues (7). Wilson & McCollum assert that the size of the board is related to its

*effectiveness* in planning and decision-making. According to the researchers, small boards provide a poor atmosphere for planning because the role of the individual member is amplified and members may be less willing to yield their authority for decision-making. Large boards, on the other hand, in the interest of time, may be willing to yield authority to streamline the decision-making process (10).

### **Board Compensation**

The majority of public policy boards are voluntary organizations, and most board members are not compensated for the time required to perform board duties. In the corporate arena, board directors are generally reimbursed for their services as a signal that the organization places a real value on board support and governance (14). A qualified and committed corporate board member could earn as much as \$250,000 yearly (15). However, the 1999 Korn/Ferry study disclosed that the average annual retainer plus per meeting fee for board members is a little over \$33,000 yearly (16). The average committee-meeting fee is \$1,100 (17).

Seventeen of the 37 transit boards surveyed by Horn compensated board members for their participation (8). In most instances, rules for compensation are specified in the enabling legislation and bylaws:

*The members of the board shall serve without compensation but shall be reimbursed for any expenses incurred in the interest of the board (8, p. 65).*

There was wide variation among the systems that compensated board members. Elected officials who also serve as board members are usually salaried, and serve on boards as a condition of their employment. Compensation was primarily restricted to citizen members of the board. Fifty dollars per board meeting was the norm in the majority (57%) of the systems that compensated members. In four of the systems, board chairs received additional compensation for the added responsibility of serving as chairperson. All of the respondent systems reimbursed members for expenses incurred in the performance of their board duties (8).

### **Board Meeting Frequency**

Board meetings allow the directors to discuss important issues, and enough meetings should be scheduled to ensure that key issues receive the board's attention.

Researchers reported that most transit boards meet on a monthly basis. Research also revealed that corporate companies are moving toward an average of eight meetings per year, down from ten to twelve meetings (12). Another corporate study revealed that an average director spends 163 hours annually on board matters, including preparation time, attendance and travel (16). In its guidelines for enhancing the professionalism of boards, The National Association of Corporate Directors stated that directors should budget four full 40-hour weeks of service for every board on which they serve. In this regard, the guidelines also caution executives to sit on no more than one to three boards (18).

## **Committee Structure**

Corporations also use committees to supplement board meetings. Committees meet on average between two and five times per year (13). Standard corporate committees are *Audit, Finance, and Compensation*. In the Korn/Ferry “26th Annual Board of Directors Study” fifty-six percent indicated they have a formal committee that reviews corporate governance processes and board operations. Seventy-five percent of the respondent corporations also have a *Nominating* committee (12). This committee is charged with recruitment of new directors (6).

Nearly all of transit board respondents used committees to conduct the work of the board (2), (8), (9). Results from Horn’s study disclosed that seventy-five percent of the respondents had a standing committee structure within the board. The number of committees ranged from one to twelve. At that time, *Finance, Personnel, Operations, Public Relations, and Planning* were the most frequently used committees (8, p. 187). In a recent study, sixty-five percent of the respondent transit boards reported using two to seven committees. In addition, the majority of boards also used ad hoc or special purpose committees (11).

## **Board Orientation and Training**

The lack of orientation and training was raised in national study of board members in the general nonprofit sector. Forty percent of the 1500 respondents received formal orientation when they joined the boards, while sixty-eight percent indicated that they were very interested in on-going education and/or training (19). Experience with transit

boards is similar. Transit boards are primarily comprised of citizens who are not necessarily experienced in transportation or public governance. The research indicates that the majority of new board members receive little, if any, orientation or continuing education and training to assist them in defining their role and responsibilities as board members. Most directors are in favor of a comprehensive orientation program for new board members and ongoing education throughout a director's term. The orientation program should include tours and a visit with senior management (16).

Horn reported that orientation for new transit board members was very informal and unstructured, usually an initial briefing sometimes accompanied by written materials. Directors report that new board orientation programs are not effective (8). Most members reported becoming familiar with board process through exposure and contact with the other members and attending meetings. One respondent indicated that unless a new board member came to the board with solid knowledge of transportation and the community, it would take at least one year to develop a working knowledge of the board. Steinberg reported that new board member orientation and training is vital to the director's success. (Without orientation and training, it will take a corporate director approximately three years to contribute) (5). Horn concluded that board members need a program of board education, which at a minimum includes the strengths and needs of the system, the role of the board and the expectations of the individual members, including the time requirements of board service (8, p.262).

## BOARD ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The legal duties and responsibilities of board members are usually specified in the enabling legislation and/or organizational bylaws. While the legislation gives the board “power,” to govern, it fails to provide the director with the “process” for effective governance. As a result, the lines between management and the board are often blurred. Consequently, the board needs a roadmap to guide their development and to provide a clear picture of the information, commitment, processes and competencies required for board service. Board members must clearly understand their roles as stewards of their organizations (20).

The board’s basic responsibilities are policy-making, legal and fiduciary oversight, and constituent representation. Furr and Furr (21) identify the key responsibilities of the board as:

- *Strategic Guidance*: The board is not responsible for developing the strategy. However, the board is responsible for ensuring that effective strategy processes and plans are developed and implemented; and that plans are effective in achieving the intended outcomes.
- *Assuring Executive Performance*: A key responsibility of the board is to CEO feedback and evaluation.
- *Monitor Organizational Performance*: The board is responsible for monitoring implementation of strategic initiatives. For example, “are the initiatives moving as planned and achieving the intended outcomes?” Another key responsibility is to evaluate the CEO’s performance.

Research revealed that transit boards were involved in policy-making and setting goals and objectives. The majority of boards reported selecting the chief executive, setting fare levels, approving budgets, selecting auditors, approving major purchasing decisions and establishing service standards (2). Wilson and McCollum (10), when assessing the role of transit boards, found that directors were closely involved in planning transportation services. The researchers concluded that the greater the impact on riders, the greater the role of the board in operations decision-making. The majority of board respondents had final approval for new service and route elimination. Other researchers reported that transit boards were involved in citizen participation mechanisms, affirmative action and minority business enterprise policy, fare policy, route prioritization, maintaining political contacts and intergovernmental relations (9).

The transit governance research recommends that board members focus on policy, not micro-managing (22). Often, the role of the board is discussed in terms of policy versus management, where policy should be the role of the board, and administration and management, under the purview of the CEO. Researchers cautioned that, in practice, the distinction between policy and management is often distorted when board governance is characterized by a merging of management and policy-making functions (1). Transit board members often are criticized for their proclivity to get involved in day-to-day operations, and/or function as part-time administrators. The National Center for Non-Profit Boards found that board members get involved in management because of a lack of role clarity (23). Horn also emphasized that there must be some formal

understanding of the segregation of duties and responsibilities between the board and executive management because directors easily misunderstand them (8).

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE BOARD**

Furr and Furr (21) report that key characteristics for effective boards include the processes used in conducting the board's work and the competencies of the board and each individual director. Other researchers identified the following characteristics of effective boards:

- Strong relationship with CEO
- Active and committed board
- Strong board member participation
- Members who are strategic thinkers
- A diverse skill set
- Properly functioning committees
- Effective communication
- A useful process of effective board assessment.

According to Furr and Furr (20) the board of directors "must hold itself accountable for effective fulfillment of its own role in achieving the organization's specified goals."

Therefore, the board must establish objectives for its own development, its collective effectiveness as a board, and the effectiveness of individual board members. Although internal barriers can change the percentage, approximately one third of organizations evaluate the board's performance. A board that has defined its role, responsibilities and



requirements has the criteria for measuring performance (20). Although researchers include regular board assessment as a criterion for effectiveness, research consistently found that the majority of the transit boards do not measure their performance on a regular basis (11).

Ingram views assessment as a basic responsibility of nonprofit boards. Evaluating performance in fulfilling its responsibilities allows the board to recognize achievements and identify areas for improvement (23). Researchers suggest that transit boards from time to time should review the results of their actions. To measure their effectiveness, transit boards should at regular intervals assess the extent to which policies and programs have been achieved (22). Axelrod also stressed the importance of conducting regular performance assessments as an internal control for accountability (24). Walker reports that a comprehensive board self-assessment helps to identify “governance gaps, such as length and frequency of meetings, composition, all the factors” ...that go into effective board governance (25).

The Paaswell study defined board effectiveness in terms of transit system performance. These researchers explored the relationship between the type of board structure and its relationship to system performance. Transit system performance was analyzed by two performance criteria, the ability to restrain costs while increasing ridership. Their research concluded that the effectiveness of a transit governance system is explained by assessing the relationships that it does or does not foster between the transit system

and its authorizing environment. According to the researchers, key suggestions for effective boards and transit system success include:

1. Boards should include individuals who are critical to securing funding and support of key constituents.
2. Board members should include members who share the transit's vision of transit's role.
3. Boards should include members who bring a business ethic.
4. Dedicated funding contributes to success.
5. A multimodal focus enhances effectiveness.
6. Board members should focus on policy, not management.
7. Board members should have sufficient continuity and institutional memory to promote long-term planning and follow through (11).

### **Improving Board Effectiveness**

To improve effectiveness, Steinberg recommends that the board evaluate its dynamics, such as: board composition, board size, board characteristics, board member orientation, how the board functions, board by-laws, board committees and the board itself (5). The board must also learn to work together as a group and part of a team. The literature was replete with suggestions for improving transit board effectiveness (8), (9).

- Appointing bodies should carefully weigh appointments, particularly in terms of the appointee's interest and time commitment.

- Appointing bodies should get input from the board regarding the expertise or representation needed prior to making board appointments.
- The role of the board should be clearly defined, discussed and written.
- Board functions should be clearly described, discussed and written.
- Board members should have clearly defined attendance requirements.
- Board members should receive formal orientation to the board and on-going education.
- Board members should receive information in a timely manner.
- Committee assignments should be made based on the member's experience and interest.

## **SUMMARY**

The literature revealed that there is “no universal formula for what boards should look like or how they should function. The possibilities are legion.” (15, p. 176). Further, each organization has different needs and the board should reflect those needs.

However, despite the variety of board structures and composition, the right board membership with the right competencies and team dynamics remain critical factors in determining board effectiveness and efficiency. The literature also disclosed that the greater exposures to liability, increasing customer demand and organizational accountability are causing boards to recognize their public stewardship and personal accountability to the stakeholders they are appointed to serve. As a result, boards are beginning to define their duties and responsibilities and to set a strategic course for fulfilling the system's mission and goals. The literature provided a wealth of information

on policy governance and methods for evaluating the effectiveness of overall board performance, as well as the effectiveness of individual directors.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **FINDINGS**

This study was intended to (1) provide national data and information on public transit board governance and the nature and characteristics of transit boards, (2) define transit board effectiveness, and (3) develop a reference guide on public transit board governance. This chapter presents the findings of the national survey of transportation agency CEOs and board chairs, and information collected from the focus groups and case studies.

#### **PART I NATIONAL TRANSIT CEO AND BOARD CHAIR SURVEY**

This national study of transit CEO/general managers and board chairs explored the organization, characteristics and effectiveness of public transit boards. The overall response rate of 50 percent enabled the collection of reliable data and valid statistical analysis, although a longer data-collection period would have yielded even higher response rates for each group.

#### **Response Rate**

A questionnaire was sent via email or U.S. mail to 334 transit CEO/general managers and 175 transit board chairpersons of U.S. public transit systems. Sources for the transit sample population were identified from the U.S. public transit systems listed as members in the 2000 APTA Directory, and a transit system membership list provided by

CTAA. Of the total 334 transit CEO surveys sent, 175 were returned, representing a response rate of 53 percent. Of the total 175 board chair surveys sent, 77 were returned, yielding a response rate of 43 percent. Of the total 509 questionnaires disseminated, 254 were returned, yielding an overall response rate of 50 percent. Among the surveys returned, 41 were matched pairs, where both the transit CEO and board chair completed surveys. As a result, data and information were received from 213 transit systems.

### **Representativeness of the Sample**

Transit system size is classified by the non-urbanized and urbanized areas (UZAs) they serve, sub-divided by the population categories using United States Census information (FTA, 1993). According to population size, the following designations are as made.

Small systems are non-urbanized (rural) areas serving populations under 50,000.

Small-urban systems are UZAs serving populations under 200,000. Mid-sized systems are UZAs serving populations of 200,000 to 1 million. Large systems are UZAs serving populations over 1 million. The total population of U.S. public fixed route operators consists of 149 (small) non-urbanized areas, 280 small-urban UZAs, 91 mid-sized UZAs, and 34 large UZAs.

Ten percent of the respondents were from rural transit systems, which represent twelve percent of all rural systems. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents were from small UZAs, which represent twenty-four percent of small UZAs. Thirty-five percent of the respondents were from mid-sized transit systems, representing sixty-eight percent of transit systems with populations of 200,000 to 1 million; and seventeen percent of the

respondents were from large UZAs, which represent ninety-three percent of large urban transit systems. Population frequencies are displayed in Table 2.

The response rate represents fifty-two percent of the population of public transit systems that are APTA members, and thirty-two percent of the entire population of U.S. public transit operators. Overall, the response rate represents a broad spectrum of U.S. public transit systems, and is highly representative of the largest systems, which transport the majority of riders, and under-representative of the smallest systems.

## **TRANSIT SYSTEM CHARACTERISTICS**

Data gathered from Part I of the Transit CEO questionnaire are discussed as transit system demographics, which include transit system distribution by geographical location, mode, community served, and dedicated funding sources.

### ***Response Distribution by APTA Region***

The APTA regional definitions are as follows:

- Region 1: New England - CT, MA, ME, NH, NY, RI, VT
- Region 2: Mid-Atlantic/Atlantic - DC, DE, MD, NJ, NC, PA, SC, VA, WV
- Region 3: South/V.I./P.R. - AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, PR, TN, VI
- Region 4: Mid-West - IL, IN, MI, MN, ND, OH, SD, WI
- Region 5: Central/Mountain/SW - CO, IA, KS, MO, MT, NE, NM, OK, TX, UT, WY
- Region 6: West - AK, AZ, CA, GU, HI, ID, NV, OR, WA

The largest percentage (27%) of the CEO questionnaires were returned from the West Region, but at least 10% of respondents came from each APTA regional designation. Figure 1 displays the responses by geographical location. Figure 2 illustrates respondents by size by APTA region.



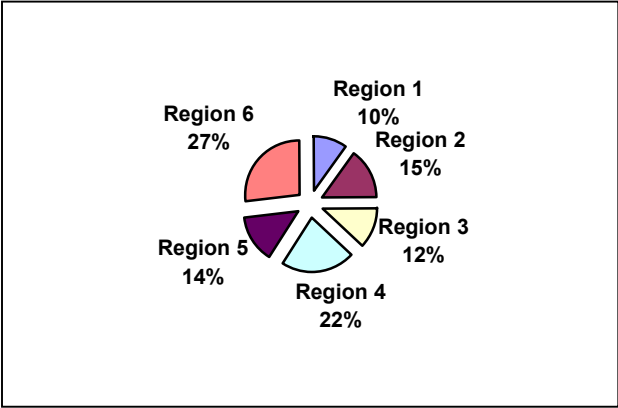
---

**Table 2**  
**Transit Systems by Size**  
**N=177**

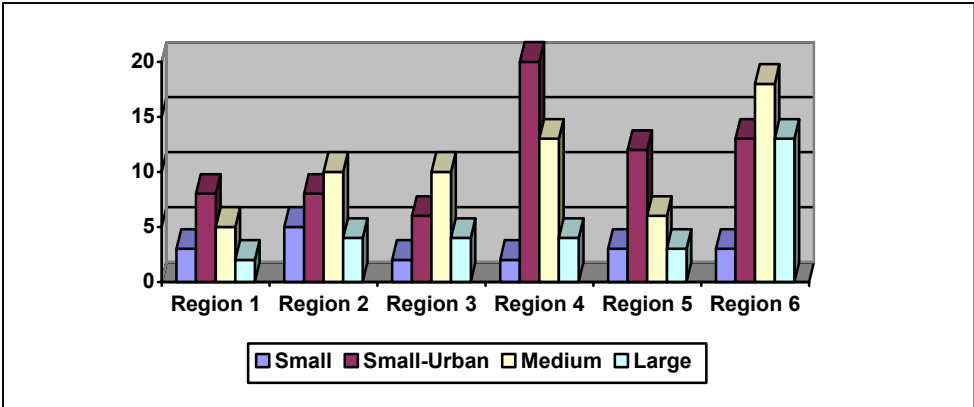
---

<b>Population Size</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Under 50,000	18	10
50,00 - 199,000	67	38
200,000 - 1 million	62	35
1,000,000 or greater	30	17
Totals	177	100

---



**Figure 1 Transit Systems by APTA Region**



**Figure 2 Transit Systems by Size and APTA Region**

### ***Response Distribution by Mode***

The vast majority of responses (85%) were received from transit systems that operate bus and complementary paratransit service as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Data are displayed in Table 3. Among the descriptions for multimodal services were: bus and rail, bus and light rail, bus, rail, and light rail, bus, rail, commuter rail, bus, ferry, and water taxi service.

### ***Response Distribution By Community Type***

Transit CEO responses represented a wide range of community types, but the responses from urban areas dominated (39%). Table 4 displays responses by community type.

### ***Response Distribution by Dedicated Funding Sources***

Fifty-five percent of the transit CEOs reported at least one source of local dedicated funding. Funding sources are shown in Figure 3.

Sources of “Other” funding included a designated percentage of: mortgage recording tax, vehicle registration fees, car rental fees, business contribution, partial ad valorem tax, electric and natural gas revenues, lottery, metropolitan area bridges, tunnels, tour taxes, and local town share.

## **TRANSIT BOARD CHAIR CHARACTERISTICS**

Data gathered from Part I of the Board Chair questionnaires are presented as characteristics of the respondent board chairs. This discussion includes the number of years on board, reason for serving, employment status, frequency of public transportation use, and understanding of transportation.

### ***Number of Years on Board***

Among the board members who responded to the survey, experience, defined as number of years served on the board, was extensive. The numbers of years served on boards ranged from less than one year to 35 years, with seven respondents serving 20 years or more. Figure 4 shows that 81 percent have served at least four years; over half have served at least seven years; and 42 percent have served ten years or more on transit boards. The length of service may reflect the fact that 75 percent of the board respondents were board chairpersons.

### ***Reason for Serving on Board***

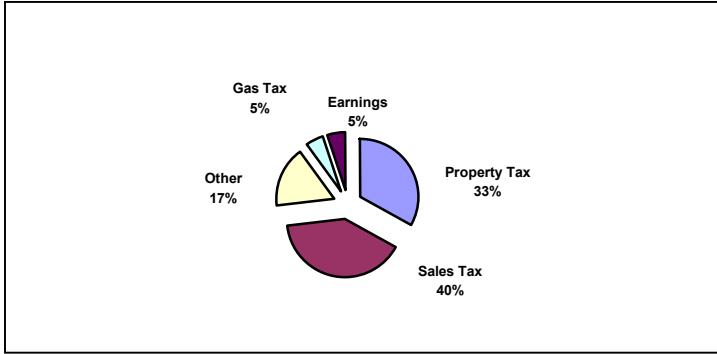
Approximately one-third (34%) of the board members reported that the main reason they serve on the board is because they were asked to do so by an elected official. The

**Table 3**  
**Transit Systems by Mode**  
**N=177**

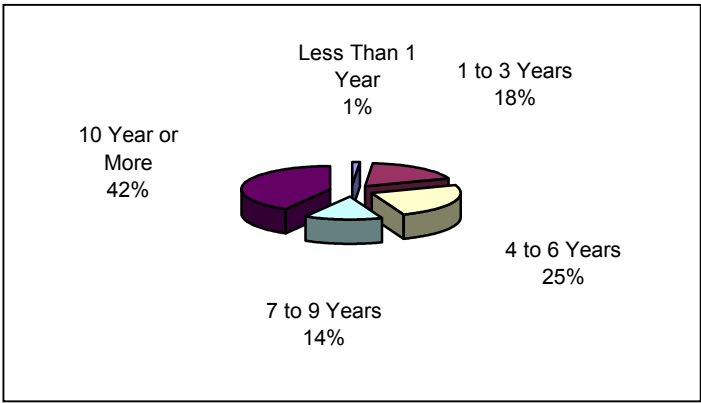
<b>Mode</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Bus/Paratransit	150	85
Rail Only	1	0.6
Light Rail/Trolley	2	1
Demand Responsive Only	3	2
Multimodal	21	12
Totals	177	100

**Table 4**  
**Transit Systems by Community  
Type**  
**N=173**

<b>Community Type</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Urban	68	39
Suburban	11	6
Rural	8	5
Urban/Suburban	46	27
Urban/Rural	7	4
Urban/Suburban/Rural	33	19
Totals	173	100



**Figure 3 Sources of Local Dedicated Funding**



**Figure 4 Board Chairs' Number of Years on Board**

second most common reason (30%) was commitment to community service. Interest in public transit was the main reason for board service for another 27 percent of the respondents. Data are displayed in Table 5.

### ***Employment Status***

Approximately one-third (34%) of the board chairs are employed in professional positions (Table 6). The second largest group, business owners, represented 21 percent of the board members who responded to the survey. Nineteen percent of the respondents are elected officials, and seventeen percent are retired.

### ***Frequency of Public Transit Use***

Slightly more than one-half (52%) of the board respondents ride the transit system in their communities (Table 7). The remaining 48 percent do not ride the public transit system.

### ***Understanding of Transit***

Forty-two percent of the board chairs rated their understanding of transit as “very good,” almost one-third (29%) described their understanding as only fair to good (Figure 5).

## **ORGANIZATION AND COMPOSITION OF BOARDS**

Most public transit boards were created as part of the statute establishing the transit system. Typically the enabling legislation (or subsequent by-laws) specifies the selection method, terms of office, officers and structure and organization of the board. For example, in one large urban transit system, the enabling statute *designates the State Secretary of Transportation as Chair of the transit board*. In another system, the *State Commissioner of Transportation is automatically an ex-officio member of the transit board*. This section presents data collected from both the Transit CEO and Board Chair questionnaires on the organization and composition of transit boards. The information presented includes board selection method, size, and length of terms and demographics of board membership.

### **Board Member Selection**

In 60 percent of the CEO responses, appointment by an elected official was the predominate method of board member selection. Publicly elected boards only accounted for three percent of the responses. The research identified the following types of board selection methods:



### ***Appointed by Elected Officials***

Members are appointed by a local or state elected official or entity, usually the chief executive officer such as governor, mayor or a legislative body such as the city council or county commission. In some instances, the nomination of a prospective board

**Table 5**  
**Board Chairs' Reasons for**  
**Serving on Board**  
**N=77**

<b>Reason for Serving</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Asked to Service by Elected Official	26	34
Commitment to Community Service	23	30
Part of Duties	3	4
Interest in Public Transit	21	27
All of Above Reasons	3	4
Other	1	1
Totals	77	100

**Table 6**  
**Board Chairs by Employment**  
**Status**  
**N=77**

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Business Owner	16	21
Elected Official	15	19
Professional Employee	26	34
Public Sector Employee	6	8
Retired	13	17
Unemployed	1	1
Totals	77	100

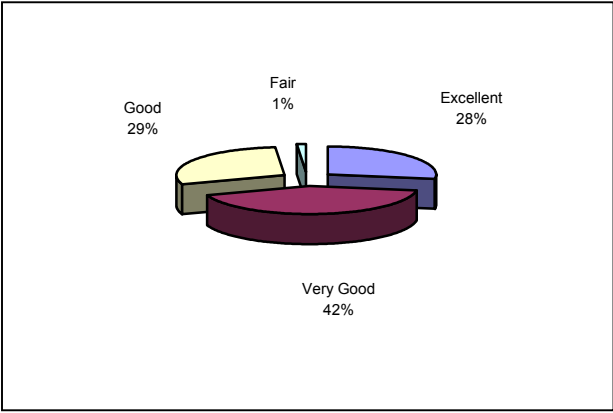
---

**Table 7**  
**Board Chairs by Frequency of**  
**Public Transit Use**  
**N=75**

---

<b>Use Public Transit</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Daily	1	1
Weekly	1	12
Monthly	14	19
Occasionally	12	16
Annually	3	4
Do Not Ride	36	48
Totals	75	100

---



**Figure 5 Board Chairs' Understanding of Public Transit**

member by the chief executive requires confirmation by the local or state legislative body.

### ***Appointed by Non-Elected Officials Board***

Non-elected officials, such as a county transportation agency, appoint citizen representatives to the board.

### ***Joint Powers Authorities***

Joint powers authorities (JPA) are regional boards where elected officials appoint members to represent jurisdictions within the transit system service area. For example, one JPA board reported *10 members, representing 9 municipalities and one county within the service boundaries*. Another described their board composition as *13 mayors of the local jurisdictions*.

### ***Elected Official Boards***

Elected official entities, such as a city council or county commission, also serve as the transit board as part of their elected official duties. In some cases, *board members must be members of the county commission*. As one respondent explained, *Board members are elected indirectly, because only elected officials can serve on the board*.

### ***Publicly-elected Boards***

Board members are elected through the general public elections usually held every four years.

### ***Mixed Boards***

Mixed boards are comprised of a combination of elected officials and citizen representatives. Two parallel mechanisms exist for board member selection. Usually elected officials appoint the elected official members and citizen members are appointed or elected by non-elected officials. In some systems, board members can volunteer for the citizen representative seats on the board.

### ***Transportation Advisory Board***

A transportation advisory board is a citizen-type advisory board with no board powers. Members may be appointed by an elected or non-elected entity or volunteer for board membership. The advice offered by transportation advisory boards may or may not be taken. Only one respondent described its board as *a transportation advisory committee, where members are appointed by the city council to provide guidance and recommendations only.*

Eleven percent of the respondent CEOs do not have transit governance boards. CEO-reported methods for selecting board members are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8**  
**Transit CEOs by Board Member**  
**Selection Method**  
**N=177**

<b>Selection Method</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Appointed by Elected Officials	107	60
Appointed by Non-Elected Officials	2	1
Joint Powers Authorities	4	
Elected Official Boards	30	17
Publicly-Elected Boards	5	3
Mixed Boards	9	5
Transportation Advisory Board	1	0.6
No Transit Board	19	11
<b>Totals</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100</b>

An elected official appointed eighty-four percent of the respondent board chairs to their boards. Five percent ran for office and were publicly elected. Data are displayed in Table 9.

Appointing bodies for the board chairs included:

- Governor
- Mayor
- City Council
- County Board of Supervisors
- County Commission
- State Senate
- Township Supervisor

## **Board Size**

CEOs reported board sizes that ranged from two to twenty-nine members. The majority (55%) of the boards have between seven and ten members, with nine as the average board size, displayed in Figure 6. Four percent of the transit boards have four members or less; 19 percent have six members or less. Twenty-six percent have larger boards of eleven members or more. Some boards have alternates with no voting authority.



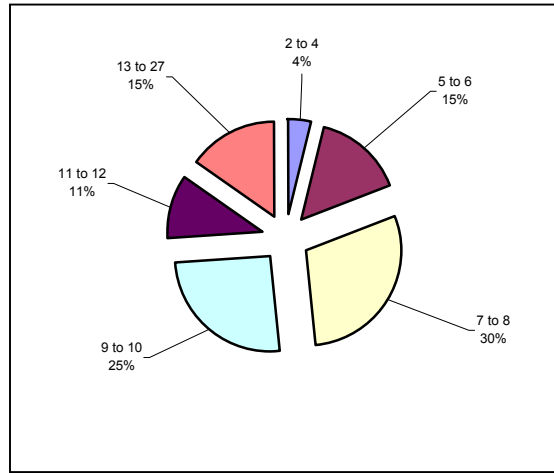
---

**Table 9**  
**Board Chairs by Board Member**  
**Selection Method**  
**N=75**

---

<b>Method</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Appointed by Elected Official	63	84
Appointed by Non- Elected Official	3	4
Elected Official Boards	3	4
Publicly-Elected Boards	4	5
Mixed Boards	2	3
Totals	75	100

---



**Figure 6 Transit Board Size Reported by CEOs**

Board chairs also reported an average board size of nine members. Of the 77 board chairpersons, 51 percent reported board sizes between seven and nine members (Figure 7).

The mean number of board members reported was nine. Medium-sized boards, those that fall between seven and ten members appeared to be the most popular. Several boards reported vacancies; in one small system, the rate stood at 50 percent. Out of the 157 boards described by CEOs, five percent had one vacancy; 1.7 percent had two vacancies; and another one percent had three or four vacancies.

### **Length of Terms**

According to the transit CEOs, the length of board member terms varies greatly, both in terms of number of years and re-appointments. Most respondents (55%) reported board terms of three or four years. Only six percent of transit boards in this study expect a one-year commitment; these short terms may be renewable. In contrast to the information reported by the board chairs, CEOs reported that only 10 percent of their board members remain for five years or more. Terms that do not expire were associated with agencies that keep a member on the board in perpetuity (have a standard member slot on the board). Board terms reported as *open-ended*, were usually board members appointed by city or county officials that *serve at the pleasure of their parent boards or councils*. Most CEOs reported board terms of three (26%) or four (29%) years. These data are displayed in Figure 8.

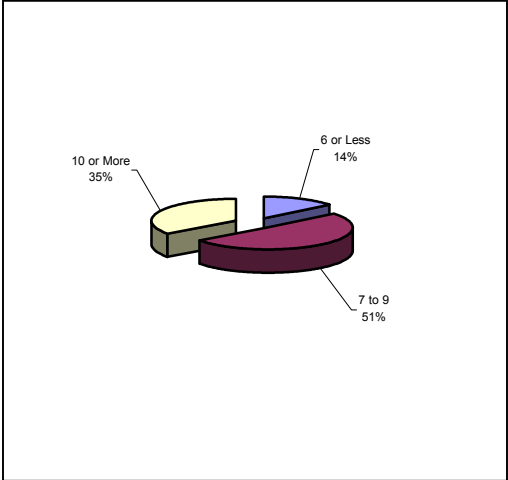
Transit CEOs reported wide variation in board members terms. In some cases, board members serve staggered terms (for example, two and four or five years) to provide continuity over time. Even when board terms are open-ended, indeterminate, or dependent upon term of office in an elected position, the board *chair's* term may be limited to four years or less. Board member terms may vary according to the appointing bodies. For example, one year for locally elected members; two years for House of Delegate members; and four years for Senate members. Citizen members, in contrast, appear more likely to serve a defined term.

### **Board Member Demographics**

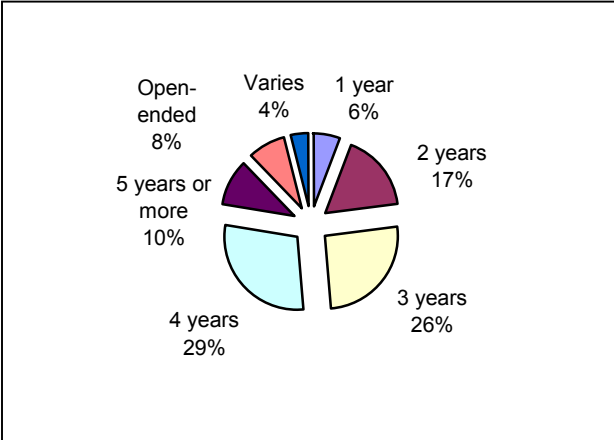
The following presents data collected on board composition, in terms of gender, diversity and members with disabilities, as reported by the CEOs. Most of the transit executives completed the gender and disability sections, but many left the racial/ethnic identification blank. Researchers called them and asked if they would be willing and able to provide the information.<sup>1</sup> All but twenty respondents provided the information, as shown below.

---

<sup>1</sup> Researchers stressed that the information would be reported anonymously and that respondents could pass on this question if they wished. Most said they did not report it because they were not sure or did not have time to figure it out accurately when they first filled out the survey. Given time to think it through while on the telephone, all were able to make a conscious enumeration of board member characteristics.



**Figure 7 Board Size Reported by Board Chairs**



**Figure 8 Length of Board Term Reported by CEOs**

## **Gender**

Of the 157 responses to this question, ninety percent of the CEOs reported at least one female board member, but males constitute a majority on all boards. Ten percent of the CEOs reported that their boards have no female members; while fifty percent reported one or two female board members. In reporting a ratio of 15 males to four females on one board, a respondent commented that this was *very unusual—historically, the split is usually about twelve to seven*. In the majority of the boards in this study, the ratio of male-female representation ran closer to three males to one female.

Mode was predictive of the gender of board members. Transit systems that only operate buses were more likely to have lower male percentages. In contrast, multi-modal systems were more likely to have higher male percentages. Only four all male boards were reported.

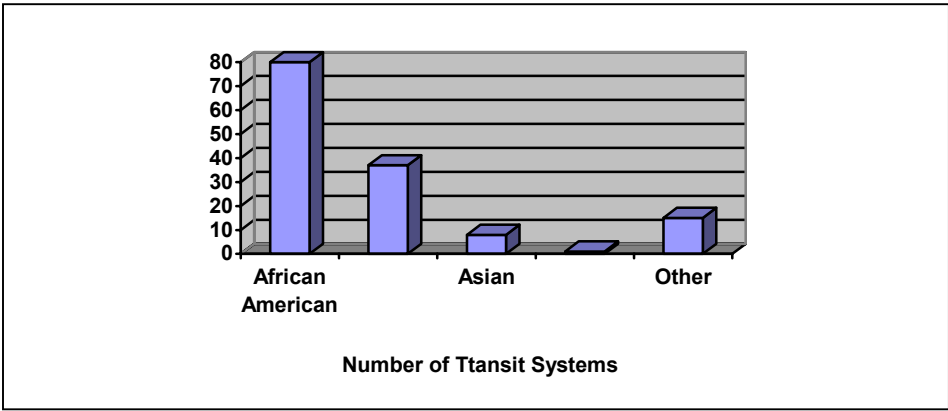
## **Race/Ethnicity**

The data show that the majority of transit boards are comprised of Caucasian members. Of the 155 CEO responses, 51 reported all White boards. The following diversity representation was reported for the remaining boards. (Numbers will not total 100 percent, because respondents could respond to more than one category).

- 52% of respondents have at least one African-American board member.
- 23% of respondents have at least one Hispanic board member.
- 5% of respondents have at least one Asian board member
- 1% of respondents have at least one Native American member
- 10% of respondents described at least one board member as “Other”.

Further analysis revealed relationships between race/ethnicity and transit system size, mode and APTA region. The more diverse boards were found in larger areas (200,000-999,999 and 1,000,000 or more). Bus only systems were less Diverse than multimodal systems. APTA region was not predictive of the racial/ethnic makeup of boards. However, Region 1 (46%) and Region 2 (40%) have the highest percentages of all white boards, while Region 3 (6%) had the lowest percentage.

Sixty percent of the board chairs reported that they currently have at least one African-American member; 19% have at least one Hispanic member; 6% have at least one Asian member; and one board (1%) reported a Native American member. Seventeen chairs reported that their boards are comprised of only Caucasians.



**Figure 9 Transit Boards by Diversity Representation**



## ***Disability***

Of the 157 CEOs who answered this question, 74 percent said that their board does not have a member with a disability (as far as they are aware). Of the 26 percent who responded affirmatively, they reported only one board member with a disability. Out of the 76 board chairs that responded to this question, 24 percent reported one board member with a disability and 4 percent reported two board members with disabilities.

## **STRUCTURE AND PRACTICES OF TRANSIT BOARDS**

This section presents data associated with the structure and practices of the respondent transit boards. Information is presented on board orientation, meeting frequency, committee structure, compensation, and administrative support.

### ***Board Orientation***

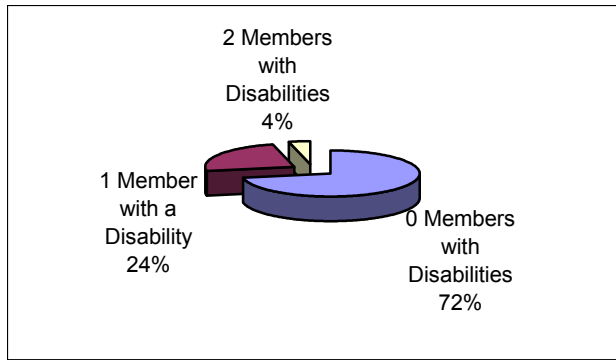
Eighty-seven percent of the CEOs reported some form of orientation for new board members.

According to the CEOs, over one-half (53%) of the transit systems that provide orientation and training to new board members only offer one form of orientation, which is usually a single session or meeting. Most often, the CEO and/or other senior staff review the system's characteristics, policies, and procedures. These meetings range

from informal, personal meetings, *the CEO sits and explains activities and plans* to more formal, organized sessions where *each department director gives a short presentation and the CEO gives an in-depth overview of the operation.*

More formalized sessions include distribution of a handbook and other materials, which include information on the transit system's policies, history, facts, and pertinent laws, and a tour of facilities and vehicles. One respondent reported sending *an informational letter from the CEO, providing background on the authority and the board and a commissioners' notebook with information on board structure, staff, state statutes, by-laws, etc.* In a few cases, new members receive only written materials; and in some cases, orientation was described as *limited*. One respondent commented, *transit board members come from the city council, so they do not need an orientation.* Others explained that city council members and county commissioners receive a broader orientation, of which transit is only one part. One CEO commented:

*"When new members are appointed to the board, I tell them staff has only two expectations: That they care about the system and the service we provide, [and] that they take the time to educate themselves about transit in general and our system in particular. If they do both, they will succeed as board members. We are fortunate that most members have taken that message to heart."*



**Figure 10 Board Members with Disabilities**

Based on the number of CEO surveys received (Table 2), a larger percentage (87%) of large urban systems provided some form of new member orientation (Table 11).

### **Board Chairs**

Ninety percent of the 77 board chairs received at least one form of orientation when they joined the board. Of those who received orientation, 26 chairs described their orientation sessions as displayed in Table 12.

For the most part, the meeting with the CEO was described as a *briefing* on the transit system operations. One respondent described the orientation as *not a formal sit-down, but a package of policies, procedures, glossary, etc., made up for board members*. The handbook contains informational materials such as *our functions as a board; Brown Act requirements; conflict of interest requirements; and our powers and duties as council members; or Board policy handbook, background, history, and future plans*.

According to 20 percent of the chairs, their orientation consisted of a meeting, handbook and materials and a facilities tour. Other comments about orientation included attending an APTA Governing Board Seminar, and other training sessions provided by APTA.

### ***Frequency of Board Meetings***

Figure 11 shows that, of the 157 CEOs who replied to this question, over two-thirds reported monthly board meetings.

Generally, board meetings may vary in purpose. For those systems that hold two board meetings per month, each meeting may serve a different function. For example, one respondent reported that one meeting is a “briefing,” and the other is “a business meeting”. In another system, the board meets twice monthly on operations and administrative matters and once monthly on maintenance issues. One respondent reported that the transit board meets 20 times a year, 12 times for monthly board meetings and eight times for committee meetings and retreat. Another agency in that region meets once a year as a “personnel committee” to evaluate the CEO. One board has workshops occasionally and one meets quarterly only. The number of members was positively associated with meeting frequency. Larger boards were more likely to meet monthly.

### **Board Chairs**

Board chairpersons also indicated that monthly board meetings are the norm. Data are displayed in Figure 12.

**Table 10**  
**CEOs by New Board Member**  
**Orientation**  
**N=157**

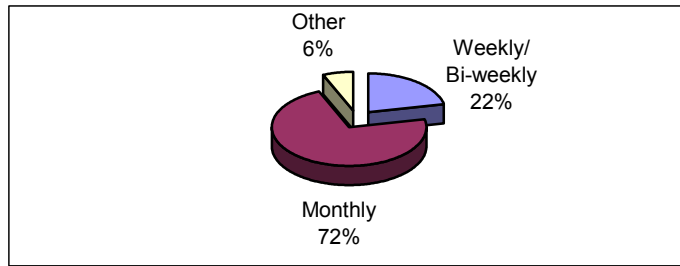
<b>Transit System</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Provide Orientation	137	87
Do Not Provide Orientation	20	13
Total	157	100

**Table 11**  
**Board Orientation by Transit**  
**System Size**  
**N=137**

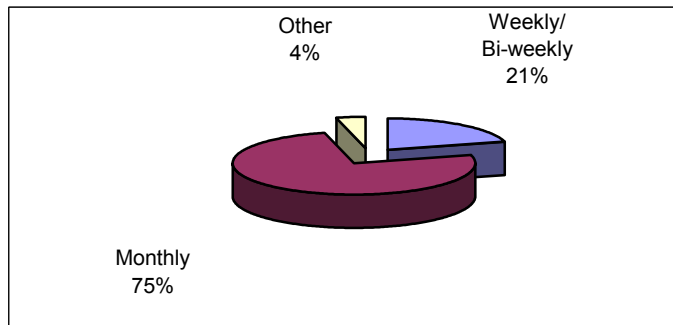
<b>Transit System</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>*Percent</b>
Small	11	61
Small-Urban	50	75
Mid-Sized	50	81
Large	26	87
Total	137	*
* Will not total 100%		

**Table 12**  
**Board Chair by Orientation Type**  
**N=26**

<b>Type of Orientation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Meeting with CEO/Staff	13	50
Handbook/Materials	4	15
Meeting and Handbook/Materials	2	8
Meeting and Facilities Tour	1	4
Handbook/Materials and Tour	1	4
Meeting, Handbook/Materials and Tour	5	19
Totals	26	100



**Figure 11 Board Meeting Frequencies**



**Figure 12 Meeting Frequency Reported by Board Chairs**



## ***Committee Structure***

Seventy-two percent of CEOs said that their boards have at least one committee. Board size was associated with the existence of committees. Eighty-eight percent of board chair respondents reported using committees to conduct the work of the board. The majority of the chairs indicated that committees meet on an as needed basis. The second largest group of respondents indicated that their board committees meet monthly.

The research revealed that smaller boards were less likely to have committees; medium-sized boards were the most likely to have committees. Interestingly, only 30 percent of all boards that have committees are in the largest board category. This finding may suggest that they are actually county commissions or city councils and the transit board is functioning as a “committee” of those groups. Both the CEO and the board chair respondents identified the following most commonly used committees in rank order:

## ***Type of Board Committees***

CEOs reported that board members are appointed to and expected to serve on at least one committee. Committee meeting frequencies vary. Some are held at different times between regular board meetings; and sometimes committee meetings are held in conjunction with full board meetings. The majority of the board chair respondents

reported that their committees meet on an as needed basis; followed by committees that meet monthly.

- Finance/Budget
- Human Resources
- Executive
- Planning
- Marketing
- Legislative/Government Relations

Many transit organizations combine several functional areas into one committee. For example, one system reported combining Finance, Budget, Legislative, and Government Relations into one standing committee that meets twice a month; another combines Legislative/Government Relations with Marketing. Some major functions may occur infrequently, but are crucial to board and system functioning. For example, core board activities such as CEO selection, CEO evaluation, or establishing new fares, might be significant but might not occur more often than every three years or so. One CEO indicated *that an Audit Committee meets on an ad hoc basis and an Administrative Advisory Committee meets once a year or whenever major issues emerge (such as budget, fares, or major service changes).*

In some cases, the larger systems maintain committees that meet regularly that may be combined or meet on an ad hoc basis for smaller systems. For example, one large

system maintains separate committees for Audit, Safety, Capital Improvements, and Interagency Coordination. One CEO commented:

*“The finance committee meets on an as-needed irregular basis. I have found that the elected officials are so busy with other issues affecting their jurisdictions that additional meetings are hard for me to get them to attend. Some must travel over 60 miles in one direction to attend transit meetings. As a result, we build in sufficient time during regular board meetings so that they can be briefed on budget issues. I understand that this is not the traditional committee model. However, we do save a lot of time explaining budget issues to board members only once. We also hold an annual budget retreat in September for direction in developing the new budget for the coming year. “*

### **Board Administrative Support**

Both the CEOs (66%) and the board (79%) respondents reported that their transit boards are provided some form of administrative support. Thirty-three percent of the CEOs reported full-time administrative support staff (Figure 13).

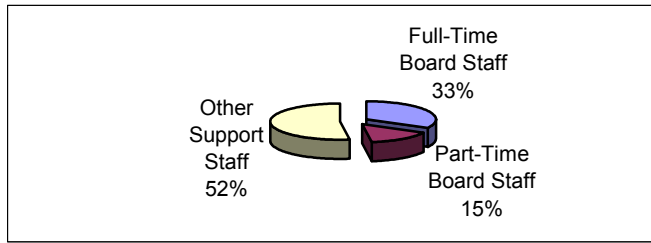
The majority (52%) of the CEOs who listed “other” sources of board staffing said they receive part-time support from the transit system staff, especially their own administrative staff. In most instances, *The General Manager’s Executive Assistant is also Clerk of the Board*. Several CEOs reported that they staff the board themselves, as needed. This was more likely in smaller systems.

When board support is examined more closely, the following pattern appears in relation to board size: Small boards are slightly less likely to have support staff. This is not statistically significant, but suggests a trend that could be explored with a larger sample (Figure 14).

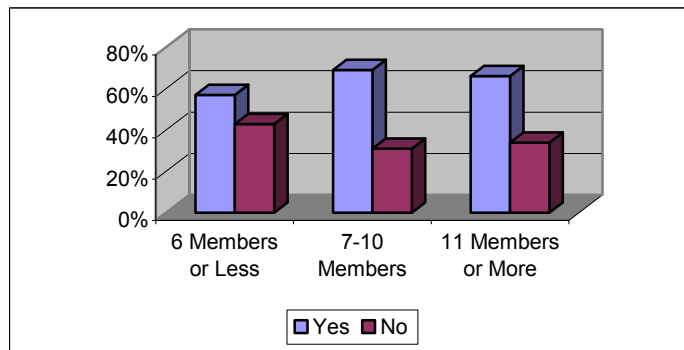
### ***Board Compensation***

Seventy percent of the CEOs that participated in this study reported that they do not compensate board members for the time or expenses incurred in performance of their board duties or attending meetings. Of the board chair respondents, forty-two percent receive \$50 per board meeting either monthly or annually. Almost one-third (30%) of the boards reimburse members for expenses incurred while attending meeting and/or compensate them for time expended for board meetings. CEOs reported that compensation is usually limited to citizen members of the board.

For the most part, if the elected officials receive a salary for their elected position, they may not be compensated for attendance at board meetings. Two transit systems reported reimbursing board members who are elected officials for board meeting related travel. These data are displayed in Tables 13, 14, and 15.



**Figure 13 Type of Board Administrative Support**



**Figure 14 Board Support by Size**

The mean compensation per full board meeting attendance was reported as \$50.00. One of the transit systems reporting also reimburses for related travel expenses, and another pays \$50.00 per attendance for board meetings for a maximum of four full board meetings per year. Several transit systems place limits on the number of meetings compensated per month. For example, one of the systems that pays \$100.00 per board meeting, imposed a limit of four meetings per month, while another will compensate \$50.00 per meeting, for up to five meetings per month.

In addition to reporting compensation per meeting, month or year, one CEO reported reimbursing for board meeting travel at a rate of 28 cents per mile; another also reimburses at 28 cents per mile and hotel expenses for board meeting attendance. In one system, only the board chair and secretary receive compensation. Both receive \$100.00 per board meeting while other members are not compensated for time or expenses for full board meeting attendance.

### ***Purpose of Compensation***

In the 53 transit systems reporting, the majority (55%) of compensation covers “time” expended for attendance at board meetings. Surprisingly, only 14 percent of board members are reimbursed for expenses only (Figure 15).

### ***Board Chair Compensation***

In three respondent systems, the board chair receives additional compensation as follows:

- Chair receives \$75.00 per meeting; members receive \$50.00
- Chair receives \$55.00 per meeting; members receive \$45.00
- Chair receives \$1000.00 per month; members receive \$750.00 per month.

**Table 13**  
**Compensation Paid Per Board Meeting**  
**N=38**

<b>Amount Paid</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
\$25.00 - \$45.00	8	21
\$50.00	20	53
\$70.00 - \$75.00	3	8
\$100.00	5	13
\$200.00 - \$250.00	2	5
Total	38	100

**Table 14**  
**Compensation Paid Per Month**  
**N=8**

<b>Amount Paid</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
\$ 100.00	2	25
\$ 125.00	1	12.5
\$ 695.00*	1	12.5
\$ 700.00	1	12.5
\$ 800.00	1	12.5
\$1,000.00	1	12.5
Total	8	100

\*Plus benefits



---

**Table 15**  
**Compensation Paid Per Year**  
**N=4**

---

<b>Amount Paid</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
\$ 300.00	1	25
\$1,200.00*	2	50
\$6,000.00**	1	25
Total	4	100

---

\*One system pays \$1200 per year plus life insurance, travel and registration to two APTA conferences

\*\*Plus benefits

---

### ***Compensation for Board Committee Meetings***

Only nineteen of the transit systems that compensate board members, pay compensation for attending committee meetings. The amount of compensation per committee is identical to the amount paid per board meeting with the exception of two transit systems. One system pays \$25.00 per board meeting and \$15.00 per committee meeting. Another pays \$50.00 per board meeting and \$50.00 per committee only if a quorum exists. The purpose of committee compensation is identical to board meeting compensation. *A board chair commented about compensation:*

*“Fortunately, we have not had to use the restrictions of the by-laws during my tenure. Our members are very dedicated and attend meeting regularly with the exception of emergencies. Therefore, under our current president, we have adopted an unwritten policy of paying the full amount until someone abuses this policy. We are reimbursed for all expenses that occur at least fifty miles from our authority’s jurisdiction.”*

Analysis of the data revealed relationships between compensation and other variables. Mode was associated with the existence of board compensation. Boards in bus only systems were less likely to receive compensation, while multi-modal systems are more likely to be paid for their board participation. APTA Region was associated with the existence of board compensation. Only seven percent of Region 1 boards receive compensation; Region 6 has the highest rate of compensation, at 65 percent. Transit

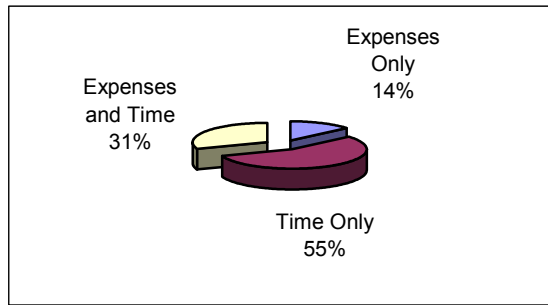
system size was not in itself predictive of the existence of board compensation, but the smallest service areas were the least likely to report compensation.

## **BOARD ROLES AND DUTIES**

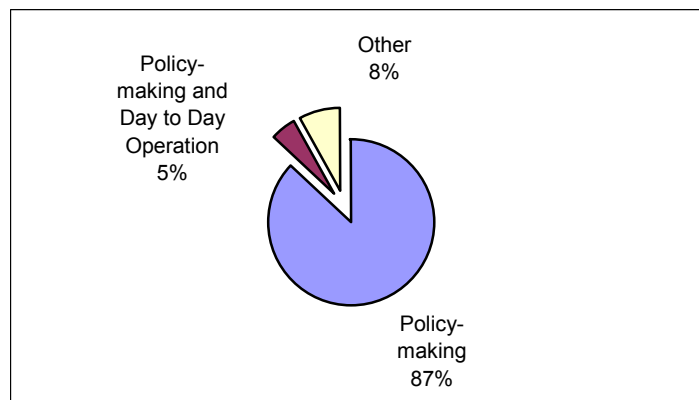
The following presents data associated with the roles and duties of board members in the respondent transit systems. This section will present information on the primary role, activities, prioritization of board activities and the role of the board chair.

### **Primary Role**

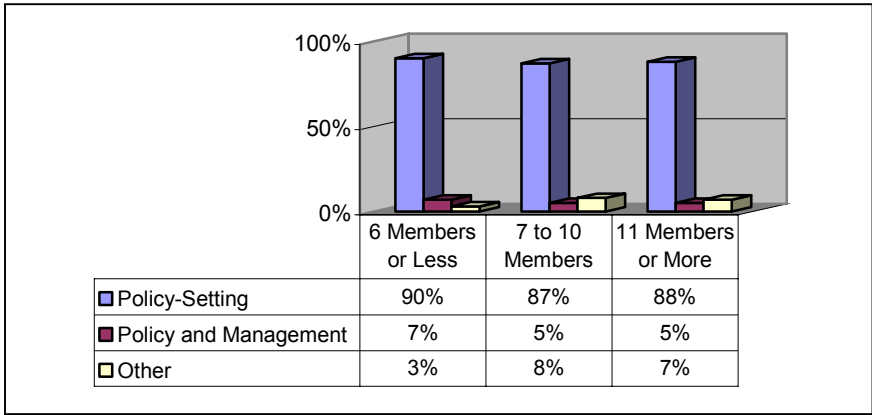
Eighty-seven percent of the chief executives and ninety percent of the board chairs see the board's primary role as policy-maker. Although offered the choice of identifying the role of their boards as day-to-day management, none selected this option. Only five percent of the CEOs selected the combination of policy-making and day-to day operation (Figure 16).



**Figure 15 Purpose of Board Compensation**



**Figure 16 Primary Role of the Board**



**Figure 17 Primary Role by Board Size**

## **Primary Activities of the Board**

Of the 75 board chairs that answered this question, the largest percentage named Fiduciary and Budget Approval (91%) or CEO Performance Evaluation (90%) as customary activities. The top ten activities selected by the majority are listed in rank order (Table 16). The first group of five typical board activities involves fiscal oversight, CEO selection and evaluation, planning, and establishing fares. The second group of five involves the board setting priorities for the transit agency, fiscal control, and working with elected officials. The respondent CEOs identified the top three activities of their boards as budget approval, CEO selection and establishing organizational priorities.

## **Prioritization of Activities**

According to the CEOs, board members spend considerable time on major policy questions, fiscal issues and planning for the future. Data indicate that board members spend the most time on the following activities presented in rank order:

- Establishing Service Policies/Standards
- Fiduciary/Budget Approval
- Strategic Planning
- Overall Fiscal Control
- Setting Organizational Priorities

## **Board Chairs**

Board chair respondents identified Fiduciary/Budget Approval as the number one activity and ranked Setting Organizational Priorities as a higher priority than Overall Fiscal Control.

## **Role of the Board Chair**

The majority of the CEOs indicated that their board chair serves as a facilitator, whose primary role is to moderate the meetings and help the board to work well. As facilitator, the board chair oversees the meetings *and guides and directs as an equal member*. As several respondents expressed, *“The chair simply runs the meetings. [The chair] facilitates the discussion and policy direction at meetings. He has one vote just like every member.”*

Generally, the CEOs described their board chairs in terms of *general leadership with no specific power* other than setting the board meeting agendas, chairing the meetings, assigning members to committees, and serving as primary liaison between the board and the agency, council, or commission. One CEO characterized this type of chair as having the “same duties, responsibilities and authority as others on the board. No more, no less.” A board chair respondent also commented that the chair is an equal member but does *set agenda, work directly with staff, and controls board meetings*. Nonetheless, one respondent acknowledged the possible influence this type of chair might have with its board and with the CEO: *He can influence the agenda, provide*

---

**Table 16**  
**Respondents by Primary Activities**  
**N=75**

---

Fiduciary/Budget Approval  
CEO Performance Evaluation  
CEO Selection  
Strategic Planning  
Establishing Fares  
Setting Organizational Priorities  
Liaison with Elected Officials  
Overall Fiscal Control  
Contracting  
Community Relations (General)

---



*leadership and suggest initiatives, and set the tone and relationship with contract employees.”*

## **Board Chairs**

The majority of board chairs also described their roles as chair as a *facilitator* for the board’s work. They described their primary duties as:

- Leadership and moderation
- Liaison with the CEO
- Committee appointments.

Selected comments are listed below.

- *The chairperson exerts “general leadership” including setting the board meeting agendas, chairing the meetings, assigning members to committees, and serving as primary liaison between the board and the agency, council, or commission.*
- *Chairs run the board meetings; make committee assignments; may have additional contact with outside agencies.*
- *Chairperson communicates with and receives suggestions and recommendations from the mayor, then communicates to board for support.*
- *[The chair is] an equal member but does set agenda, works directly with staff, and controls board meetings.*

The board chair's relationship to management was described as somewhat more visible. The chair was described as the board contact person and representative to the CEO. In this function the chair communicates with the CEO on behalf of the board. Board chairs emphasized the myriad ways in which a chairperson who plays a strong role vis-à-vis the CEO exercises power and influence.

- *Coordinates board and organizational direction; [serves as] liaison with business, corporate, and elected officials; maintains close contact [with the CEO]; sets the board agenda; and serves as advisor to the CEO.*
- *CEO directly reports to board and takes direct action from chairman. CEO is accountable to board and board chairperson for achievement of pre-set/defined objectives, set annually. As such, CEO is subordinate to board chairperson, but the two function in a constructive partnership, with board chairperson and board standing as ultimate authority on policy choices.*
- *We follow his lead when necessary and he depends on the board for suggestions and our leadership. [The] General Manager is our eyes and ears, as transit is only one of many boards the elected officials appointed to the board serve on.*

## **BOARD EFFECTIVENESS**

This section addresses transit board effectiveness. Data collected on (1) board assessment and transit CEO, (2) board chair perceptions of effectiveness, and (3) the

factors that influence transit board effectiveness were analyzed. The section concludes with respondent suggestions for improving board effectiveness.

## **Board Assessment**

Eighty-three percent of the 157 respondent CEOs indicated that their systems do not formally measure transit board effectiveness. Some CEOs pointed out that, although effectiveness may not be measured formally, the board's *performance is measured in terms of the transit system's overall record of performance or by the media and voters*. When identifying the entity responsible for the assessment of board effectiveness, *self-assessment* was the most frequent (39%) response. CEO comments explained that *self-assessment* is usually an informal process that takes place in the context of goal setting. According to CEOs, entities responsible for assessment are illustrated in Figure 18.

One CEO commented that the board measures its performance informally and *not objectively*. According to another CEO:

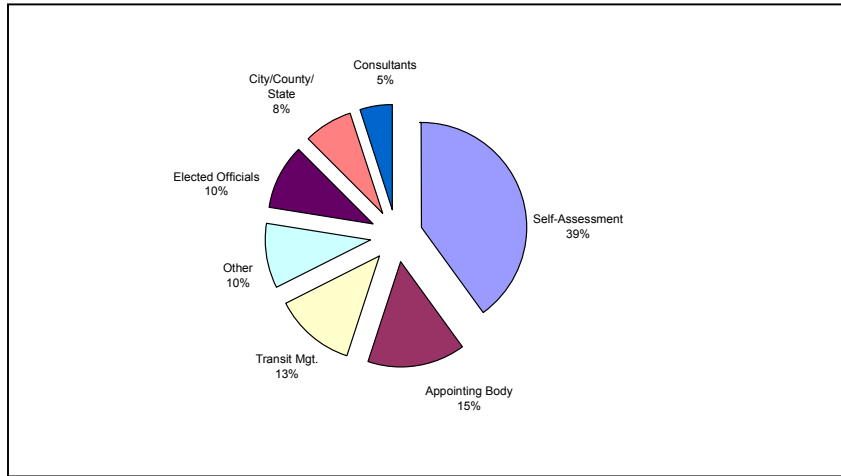
*"We have an annual retreat to measure effectiveness [to determine]: Did we meet our goals for the year? But the result doesn't have much impact on board effectiveness. We don't say, "Bad board!" We move on to set next year's goals."*

In describing self-assessment, a CEO stated that the board approves the annual work program and charts the progress of board and staff together. According to another respondent, the board engages in self-assessment as related to the annual business

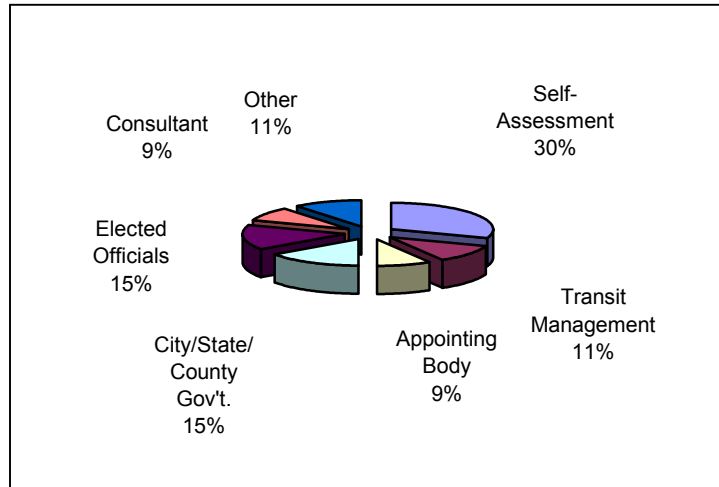
plan, which lists board objectives for the year. Generally, CEOs commented that transit system performance is the real measure of transit board effectiveness; “performance results, competitive prices and reliable service” are the measurable outcomes of board effectiveness.

### **Board Chairs**

Only 33 percent of the board chairs reported that board assessments were conducted. Of this group, ten percent reported hiring consultants to perform this evaluative function. Although the data point out that effectiveness is rarely formally measured, it may be measured on an informal basis. Generally, board chairs agreed with transit CEOs that *the board’s performance is measured in terms of the transit system’s overall record of performance or by the media and/or voters.*



**Figure 18 CEOs by Responsibility for Assessing Board Performance**



**Figure 19 Board Chairs by Responsibility for Measuring Effectiveness**

## **Frequency of Board Assessment**

Since self-assessment heads the list of who might measure board effectiveness, some CEOs were vague about when this process might occur. Of the 30 responses received, comments such as, *... as often as the county commission feels it is necessary, daily, it happened only twice, or it varies were common.* Over one-half of the CEO respondents reported that assessment occurs on an annual basis. Fifty-three percent of the board chairs conducted annual board assessments (Figure 20).

## **Ratings of Board Effectiveness**

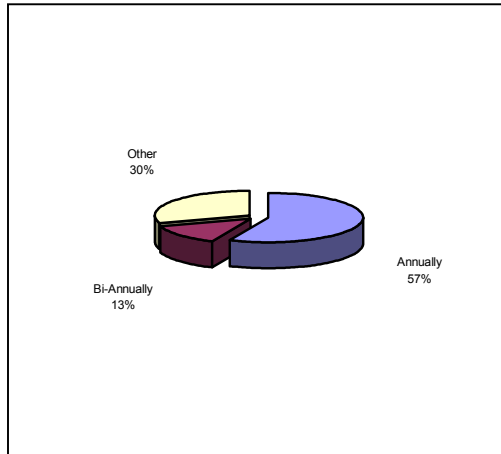
Both transit CEOs and board chairs rated board effectiveness in terms of transit system performance and the overall professionalism of the board. CEO responses are listed in Table 17. The board chair responses are listed in Table 18.

## **Overall Transit Governance**

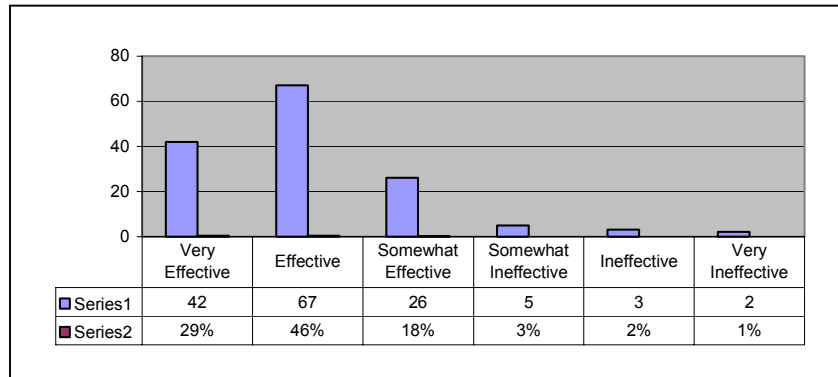
Forty-six percent of 145 CEOs and fifty-nine percent of 75 board chairs rated overall transit governance as “effective.” The highest rating, “very effective,” was given by almost one-third of the CEO respondents and twenty-nine percent of the board chairs. Only three percent of the CEOs viewed their boards as “ineffective” or “very ineffective.” Results are displayed in Figure 21 and Figure 22.

One CEO stated that:

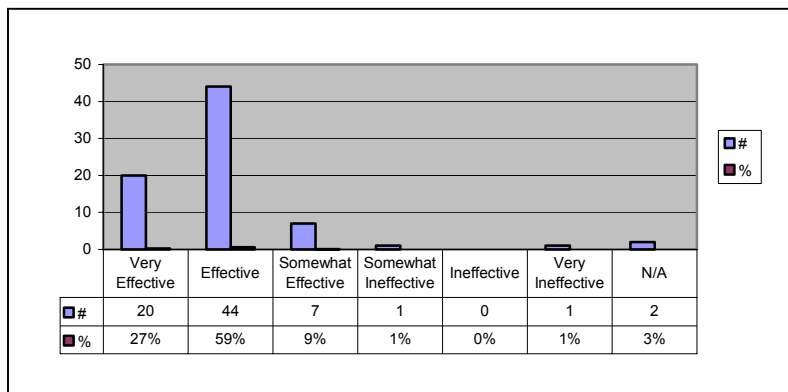
*“We do a good job, at low costs, and are very responsive to the needs of our communities. We have been doing it “simply” for the past 22 years. All our vehicles have always been accessible to the disabled. Our fleet of vehicles is 92% alternatively fueled (propane, CNG, electric battery—zero diesel) for cleaner air. We are a governor attainment area for originality. Our fares are among the lowest in the state—50 cents general public, 35 cents elderly, disabled, and children.... We do it right or we correct it to do it better. We operate on real time demand response, primarily, with scheduled intercity fixed routes. We offer twenty subsystems now. Everything is totally coordinated, including social service transportation. Big issues and direction are ignored; single-issue micromanagement is king! I have one of the best board structures I’ve ever seen: Small but extremely effective. I’ve only been with the organization three months. This is clearly the best board I’ve had the opportunity to work for or with. They are great.”*



**Figure 20 Board Chairs by Frequency of Board Assessment**



**Figure 21 CEO Ratings of Overall Transit Governance**



**Figure 22 Board Chair Ratings of Overall Transit Governance**



**Table 17**  
**CEO Ratings of Board Effectiveness**  
**N=145**

<b>Area of Function/ Performance</b>	<b>Majority Rating</b>
Ridership Growth	Somewhat Effective
Funding	Effective
Political Support	Very Effective
Planning	Effective
Transit Image	Effective
Board Professionalism	Effective

**Table 18**  
**Board Chair Ratings of Board Effectiveness**  
**N=75**

<b>Area of Performance</b>	<b>Majority Rating</b>
Ridership Growth	Somewhat Effective
Funding	Effective
Political Support	Very Effective- Effective
Planning	Effective
Transit Image	Effective
Board Professionalism	Effective

## **Influences on Board Effectiveness**

CEOs identified the top two influences on board effectiveness as *CEO/General Manager Leadership* and *Board Commitment*. Only these two factors were rated as having “Very Strong” influence on effectiveness by the CEOs; while the board chairs only rated *CEO/General Manager Leadership* a key influence. Board member commitment, the receipt of timely information, and the chair’s own ability to provide leadership were included as key influences on effectiveness by the board chairs. Clarity of the board’s role and management expectations were also considered very important to board success. The weakest influences were board orientation, measurement of board effectiveness, and compensation. Table 18 and Table 19 display the majority ratings.

## **Ratings of Board Effectiveness**

- CEOs rated their board’s effectiveness on overall transit governance slightly more favorably than their corresponding board chairpersons did. No CEOs or board chairpersons in this matched sample designated board effectiveness on overall transit governance as ineffective or very ineffective.
- Both CEOs and board chairs tended to give the board functions *effective* or *somewhat effective* ratings; smaller percentages fell into the *very effective* category on every item. CEOs were less impressed with board effectiveness in the funding arena than were chairpersons. However, no statistically significant difference appeared on t-tests of any of these items. Board chairpersons and

CEOs from the same agencies have extremely similar views of board effectiveness.

- On overall board effectiveness, CEOs were more favorable than were board chairpersons, a significant finding.

### **Influences on Board Effectiveness**

- Leadership provided by the transit CEO or General Manager has a strong to very strong influence on how the board operates. No significant differences exist in CEO and board chairperson ratings of influence items. They agree substantially that commitment is very important and compensation is least important.
- Both groups viewed the board's receipt of timely information to have a strong influence on board effectiveness. Clarity of role, clarity of management expectations, and board member's knowledge of transit also had a strong influence. Least important was board orientation. The only significant difference in communication and information variables occurred with orientation: board chairpersons were much more likely than CEOs to rate this influence on board effectiveness as strong.

**Table 19**  
**CEO Ratings of Influences on Board Effectiveness**  
**N=155**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Majority Rating</b>
CEO/GM Leadership	Very strong
Board Commitment	Very strong
Board Receipt of Timely Information	Strong
Board Chair Leadership	Strong
Clarity of Board role, Duties, Activities	Strong
Clarity of Management Expectations of the Board	Strong
Board Composition	Strong
Board Size	Strong

Most transit systems (54 %) considered compensation as having “a weak to no impact” on effectiveness.

**Table 20**  
**Board Chair Ratings of Influences on Board Effectiveness**  
**N=75**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Majority Rating</b>
CEO/GM Leadership	Very Strong
Board Commitment	Strong
Board Receipt Timely Info	Strong
Chair's Leadership	Strong
Clarity of Board Role	Strong
Clarity of Mgt Expectations	Strong
Board Composition	Strong
Board Structure	Strong
Political Responsiveness	Strong
Dedicated Funding	Strong
Planning Involvement	Strong
Committee Structure	Strong
Eval. of Mgt. Performance	Strong
Board Transit Knowledge	Strong
Board Diversity	Strong
Board Orientation	Somewhat Strong
Measure Board Effectiveness	Somewhat Weak
Compensation	Somewhat Weak

**Matched Transit CEO and Board Chair Responses on Effectiveness**

- Both CEOs and board chairpersons gave structural factors strong to somewhat strong ratings in terms of their influence on board effectiveness. Board composition, board size, and board organizational structure were viewed as the most significant influences; whether or not the agency has dedicated funding was the least significant structural influence. CEOs were significantly less likely than were chairpersons to view board size (too large or too small) as an obstacle to board effectiveness.
- Both CEOs and chairpersons were likely to say that evaluation of the CEO/GM has a strong influence on board effectiveness but “measuring board effectiveness” has a somewhat weak influence. A significant difference was found between CEO and board chairperson responses: Chairpersons were much more likely to rate the impact of this function toward the very strong/strong end of the scale than were their CEOs.

### **Improving Board Effectiveness**

In the final section of the survey, CEOs and board chairs offered suggestions for improving board effectiveness as shown in Tables 21 and Table 22. The suggested key areas for improving board effectiveness were:

1. Quality Improvement: Engage in various quality improvement strategies, such as finding ways to enhance board member commitment and time allotted for board work, or measuring board effectiveness more formally.
2. Board Composition and Structure: Improve board composition and structure by broadening board diversity (perhaps by including elected officials and others), and streamline the board and committee structures.
3. Planning: Engage in strategic and long-range planning.
4. Communication/Information Flow: Improve information, communication, and knowledge, in terms of board member experience with and knowledge of transit, and of providing information from management in a clear, timely fashion.

**Table 21**  
**CEO Suggestions for Improving Board Effectiveness**  
**N=145**

<b>Area of Improvement</b>	<b>Suggestion</b>
<b>Quality Improvement</b>	Measure Effectiveness More Board Member Time/Participation/Commitment
<b>Board/Committee Composition/Structure</b>	Streamline/Strengthen Committee Structure Improve Role Definition Improve Diversity Reduce Board Size Place Elected Officials on Board
<b>Planning</b>	Engage in/Improve Strategic Planning/Goal Setting Less Day-to-Day Management
<b>Information</b>	Increase Board Members' Use of Transit Improve Board Members' Understanding of Transit Ensure Consistent, Timely Information from Management
<b>Power/Autonomy</b>	Elect Board Members Give Board More Authority/Autonomy Give Board Less Authority/Autonomy Keep Politics out of Process Involve More Influential Community Leaders
<b>External Relations</b>	Improve Relations and Ties with Community/Other Boards/APTA/Media Improve Feedback Loop between Board and Management, Governing Councils, etc.
<b>Reward Structure</b>	Provide or Improve Compensation



**Table 22**  
**Board Chair Suggestions for Improving Board Effectiveness**  
**N=76**

<b>Area of Improvement</b>	<b>Suggestions</b>
<b>Power/Autonomy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elect Board Members</li> <li>Give Board More Authority/Autonomy</li> <li>Give Board Less Authority/Autonomy</li> <li>Keep Politics out of Process</li> <li>Involve More Influential Community Leaders</li> </ul>
<b>External Relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve Relations and Ties with Community/Other Boards/APTA/Media</li> <li>Improve Feedback Loop between Board and Management, Governing Councils, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase Board Members' Use of Transit</li> <li>Improve Board Members' Understanding of Transit</li> <li>Ensure Consistent, Timely Information from Management</li> <li>Better Communication Electronically among Members</li> </ul>
<b>Quality Improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measure Effectiveness</li> <li>More Board Member Time/Participation/Commitment</li> </ul>
<b>Structure and Role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streamline/Strengthen Committee Structure</li> <li>Improve Role Definition</li> <li>Improve Diversity</li> <li>Reduce Board Size</li> <li>Place Elected Officials on Board</li> </ul>
<b>Reward Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide or Improve Compensation</li> </ul>
<b>Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage in/Improve Strategic Planning/Goal Setting</li> <li>Less Day-to-Day Management</li> </ul>

## CEO and Board Chair Selected Comments on Improving Effectiveness

- *We believe our board is a model for governing a transit agency.*
- *As a former deputy administrator [of a government agency], I know our board is very effective.*
- *The success of our board is a good measure of the excellent working relationship we have with a superb general manager.*
- *We have a diverse group of well-educated person who are interested in the work and understand the difference between their overall policy role and the role of the general manager. Most have served for a long time: two since the company was formed in 1984; three since 1985; 1 in 2000; 1 in 2001. Open meeting law in California is a factor in how board operates. Given the current situation with the board and staff, the organization is operating very effectively.*
- *Over the history of this authority, it has always had board members who were community leaders dedicated to leading the authority, and serving the best interest of the public.*
- *Our biggest problem is funding and hiring drivers, providing longer hours of service, more frequent service with no new funding.*
- *I was elected chair based on experience and recognition. I have a great deal to learn.*
- *Chair should chair meetings rather than super-imposing her opinions from the chair.*
- *Personal publicity. More respect among board members.*

- *Our board size is determined by taxing districts and population. Appointments are very political and not necessarily the best person for the board.*
- *Our board members are political appointments. It would help tremendously if the elected officials would ask current board members for suggestions or advice on selecting new appointees.*

## **PART II      TRANSIT BOARD FOCUS GROUPS**

The goals of the focus groups were to 1) identify the characteristics of an effective public transit board; and 2) identify measures to assess the effectiveness of public transit boards. The purpose was to use comments and suggestions expressed by board members and support staff to develop a set of board characteristics and measures to accurately address the diverse experiences and activities of public transit boards.

The focus groups provided the forum for participants to serve as active collaborators in the research, by describing their experiences in their own language.

In July 2001, five focus groups were held in conjunction with the APTA Transit Board Seminar in Denver, Colorado. Eighty-three board members and support staff participated in the focus group discussions as displayed in Table 23. Treating the participants as key informants, discussions were audiotaped to ensure accuracy. Data from the transcribed audiotapes were analyzed using exploratory, interpretative analysis

to identify consistency and themes. This section presents the findings from the five focus groups.

After describing the research objectives, participants introduced themselves, their respective transit systems, and number of years as a transit board member. A number of open-ended questions were asked about the characteristics of effective board members, boards, and measures to determine the effectiveness of boards (Appendix). Participants were quite interested in answering questions and spoke freely without much prompting.

The comments were organized around the set of themes that characterized the discussions. The major dimensions of the discussion were: 1) characteristics of an effective public transit board member; 2) characteristics of an effective public transit board; and 3) measures to assess the effectiveness of public transit boards.

## **I CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PUBLIC TRANSIT BOARD MEMBERS**

The following presents the characteristics of effective board members that emerged from the discussions, followed by examples of how participants talked about the characteristics. This topic provoked energetic discussion among the participants.

---

**Table 23**  
**Focus Group Characteristics**  
**N=5**

---

	<b>Date</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Participants</b>
FG 1	7/15/01	17	Board Members
FG 2	7/15/01	8	Board Members
FG 3	7/16/01	26	Board Support Staff
FG 4	7/17/01	20	Board Members
FG 5	7/17/01	12	Board Support Staff

---

## **Advocate for the Community**

Effective transit board members advocate for services that meet the needs of the community.

- *You have to be an advocate, a steward for public transit.*
- *[You have to] respect, understand and be sensitive to the needs of the people who use the system.*
- *You got to make the ridership happy. You have to fulfill the needs of the community. You must stay in tune to the needs of the riders.*
- *You have to be aware of the needs of the community.*
- *You have to reach out to the community and listen to the community to be aware of their needs.*
- *I use the system, and I think that board members should also be public transit users.*

## **Committed to Public Transit**

Effective transit board members must be committed to and advocate for public transportation.

- *You have to be committed to public transit.*
- *You got to be committed to transit and it has to be a person who comes with something to offer the system and he is committed to do all the necessary things that he needs to do.*
- *You have to be dedicated to the transit goals of moving people and have a true interest in seeing transit go forward.*

## **Focused**

Effective transit board members are focused on the mission of the transit system and the purpose of the board.

- *At the board meetings, you have to listen and be attentive.*
- *Stay focused on the board's objectives.*
- *Focus on getting results.*
- *It's important to focus the board's attention on their work and the success of the transit system.*
- *If you want to be on the board, stay focused on why you are here.*

## **Knowledgeable**

Effective transit board members take the time to make sure that they are knowledgeable about public transit, the transit system, and current issues.

- *Board members understand the agency and have a working knowledge of the people running the system.*
- *It's important that you have a good understanding of public transit.*
- *A good board member is self-initiated, and gets educated about transit.*
- *A board member must be willing to learn about the community.*
- *You must have an understanding of and commitment to the role of public transit.*

- *You must stay in tune to the needs of the riders.*
- *A board member needs to understand the agency and know what is important. It is important to know the issues.*
- *You must have a willingness to learn.*

## **Open Communication**

Effective transit board members respect each other's opinions, but also feel free to ask timely and substantive questions.

- *Be open-minded and willing to listen, but ask questions.*
- *Stand up, face the board, and ask questions.*
- *Speak up; speak your mind, even if you are the minority opinion.*
- *Challenge what's going on, ask questions.*
- *People want board members to be intelligent and ask questions.*
- *Listen, support the majority discussion, but ask timely questions, it's for the good of the organization.*
- *Be analytical and able to digest information pretty good.*

## **Political**

Effective transit board members should be aware of or have relationships with politicians and other key leaders who may influence transit system decisions.



- *You have to be political...wearing a political hat sometimes; it's not a bad thing.*
- *[You] have to sell the need for more funding to politicians.*
- *[You] have to be a salesman, a good negotiator.*
- *Just grin and bear it to make sure that the constituents get what they need.*
- *Don't take it to the city council until you know that you have the votes to win.*

## **Prepared**

Effective transit board members perform duties responsibly and are accountable for board meeting preparation and participation.

- *You have to make time for the work of the board.*
- *Be prepared, do your homework.*
- *You have to make time, whether you want to or not.*
- *Be prepared at every meeting. Read the material. Attend all meetings.*
- *Show up on time, ready to work.*
- *Show up, show up on time, ready to work and do what you're going to do.*

## **Team Player/Consensus Builder**

Participant comments about the importance of being a team player and consensus builder and putting aside personal agendas for the good of the board appeared

consistently across all focus groups. According to these discussions, effective transit board members operate as a team and are willing to reach consensus for the good of the transit system.

- *I have been a politician for 12 years, and I have always prided myself on being a team player and able to reach consensus.*
- *If you can't work together and compromise, I don't think that you will do much good on a board. [You must] put aside personal agendas.*
- *Focus on being a consensus builder. Serve the board and transit system, not a special interest or constituency group.*
- *We do not want a person whose personal agenda gets in the way of the transit system.*
- *I think that board members should not come to the board with other motivations, a springboard to some other political position.*
- *Board members should demonstrate their ability to work for the common good, rather than their own agendas.*
- *Board members are public servants; the work should be for the good of the agency.*
- *Members should support achievement of a common goal for the good of the system.*

## **Understands the Board's Role**

Effective transit board members understand their role and responsibilities as policy-makers.

- *You must understand the distinction between policy and management.*
- *To be effective, the rule is “nose in, hands out”.*
- *You must understand your role as a policymaker, not involved in day-day management.*
- *You have to clearly understand the role of a board member.*
- *Knowing the responsibilities and expectations of a board member.*

## **II CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE BOARD**

The focus group participants identified the following characteristics of an effective transit board.

### **Achieves Goals**

An effective public transit board achieves the goals identified in the strategic plan. In terms of transit system performance, at a minimum, this would include the quality of the transit service, meeting community needs, increased ridership, etc.

## **Assesses Progress**

An effective transit board monitors its progress on an annual basis, but also conducts a through assessment every 3-5 years. Such an assessment would not only evaluate progress in terms of the transit system's performance, but also evaluate the effectiveness of the board's organization, structure and functioning, and their impact on performance. A comprehensive assessment includes evaluating the board's composition, membership, orientation, meetings, committee structure, information flow, etc., as well as transit system performance criteria. This type of assessment would be under the purview of the board development committee.

## **Balanced**

An effective transit board is balanced along several dimensions. These dimensions include age, gender, race, skills and talent, transit system riders, constituency, jurisdictional and political representation. In terms of skills and talent, many focus group participants mentioned the importance of having board members who are political, as well as those with business, financial, legal and marketing backgrounds.

## **Cohesive Group**

An effective transit board functions as a cohesive group. Open communication is encouraged, but the group supports the majority opinion. Personal and individual

agendas are eliminated or decreased for the good of the transit system. Board members are team players who are willing to support the majority decisions of the board.

### **Commitment**

An effective transit board is committed to and advocates for public transit. Board members are focused and accountable. They attend meetings, devote adequate time for meeting preparation, stay abreast of the issues, and participate in meetings and work to influence favorable outcomes for the transit system.

### **Educates**

An effective transit board informs and educates its members. All new members receive a orientation which includes at a minimum: a thorough introduction to transit, history and current facts, budget information, policies, procedures and statistics about the transit system, meetings with the General Manager/CEO and key staff, board chair and executive committee chairs and tours of the equipment and facilities and the role and responsibilities of a board member. In addition, all members are kept abreast of current issues and provided access to on-going education and training.

## **Focuses on Policy**

An effective transit board understands the distinction between policy and management, and focuses on policy-making. Member role clarity and expectations are communicated and reinforced by the board chair and executive committee. All activities, such as meetings and agenda items are designed to focus members on policy-making and away from day-to-day management concerns.

## **Good Communication**

An effective transit board has a good communication system that encourages open, honest discussion, as well as challenging questions. The board assures the flow of accurate information in a timely manner to all members, including the dissemination of written materials prior to board and committee meetings.

## **Good Relationship with CEO**

Effective transit boards have established positive and supportive working relationships with the chief executive officer and senior support staff.

## **Helps to Improve Transit System Performance**

A major objective of an effective transit board is to be able to put service on the street in a cost-effective manner that meets the mobility needs of the community. Performance

measures include cost per revenue miles, cost per revenue hours, vehicle-hours per employee and vehicle miles.

### **Increases Revenue**

An effective transit board understands and undertakes a critical fund-raising role, which includes generating ridership and farebox income. This role often includes communicating with legislators and other key leaders through meetings, information dissemination, presentations, and providing testimony.

### **Knowledgeable**

Effective transit boards do not work in a vacuum. They are knowledgeable of the community that the system serves in terms of culture and needs of the community business leaders, and other organizations.

### **Politically Astute**

Effective transit boards establish good working relationships with all constituent groups and stakeholders, including, employees, support staff, community, legislators, politicians, labor. Politically astute boards also monitor employee morale and the system's reputation and image in the community.

## **Strategic**

Effective transit boards help the transit system to set a strategic direction and shape a strategy for the future. The board helps the system to identify and maintain focus on strategic priorities.

## **Strong Chair**

A strong chairperson is essential for an effective transit board. It is the chair's role to lead and motivate the board in achievement of the transit system's mission, strategic goals, and performance.

## **III MEASURES TO ASSESS BOARD EFFECTIVENESS**

According to research, effective governance determines organizational effectiveness (23, p.1). Therefore, a key determinate of effectiveness is the performance of the transit system. The following criteria were identified by focus group participants as essential criteria to annually measure the effectiveness of public transit boards.

### **Achieves Strategic Goals**

Did the system achieve the goals and objectives as identified in the strategic plan?



### **Appearance of Equipment**

Are the vehicles and facilities safe, well maintained, clean?

### **Balanced Budget**

Did the year end with a balanced budget? Was there an increase in ridership?

### **Increased Ridership**

Did ridership increase?

### **Labor/Management Relationship**

What is the relationship between the board, transit system and labor? Were contract negotiations successful?

### **Meets Community Public Transit Needs**

Do the transit services meet the needs of the community?

### **Morale/Attitudes of Employees**

What are the attitudes/morale of the transit system employees?

## **Public Opinion of Board and Transit System**

How does the public view the system?

## **Quality of Transit Service**

Has the quality of the service improved? What are the areas of complaints?

## **Reputation with Media**

Does that transit system have a positive reputation with the media?

## **Revenue**

Was there an increase farebox income? Was there an increase in revenue?

## **Transit System Performance**

How did the transit system perform during the year?

### **Working Relationship among Board Members**

Does the board work as a cohesive group?

### **Working Relationship with General Manager/CEO and Other Staff**

Does the board have a positive relationship with the CEO and other transit system staff?

## **PART III                    CASE STUDIES**

Case studies of six transit systems were conducted to provide insight into the characteristics and organization of the transit boards and perceptions of board effectiveness. The following systems were selected for case studies:

- Downeast Transportation, Inc., Ellsworth, Maine
- The Fort Worth Transportation Authority, Fort Worth, Texas
- Kenosha Transit, Kenosha, Wisconsin
- Regional Transit District, Denver, Colorado
- Salem Area Mass Transit District, Salem, Oregon
- Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The goals of the case study visits were to: 1) observe a transit agency board meeting; 2) conduct a focus group with the board members; and 3) conduct interviews with the board chair and CEO. Interview and focus group questions were designed to collect the following information:

***Board member occupation***

- Length of time on board
- Understanding their role as a board member
- Commitment to the work of the board
- Adequacy of board orientation and training
- Perceptions of duties, roles and powers
- Adequacy of board support
- Perceptions of board effectiveness
- Suggestions for improving board effectiveness

**DOWNEAST TRANSPORTATION, INC.**

**ELLSWORTH, ME**

**APPOINTED BY NON-ELECTED OFFICIALS BOARD**

Downeast Transportation, Inc. (DTI) is a private, non-profit agency that operates regularly scheduled fixed route public bus service via 17 small buses and vans in Hancock County. DTI provides service in Ellsworth, all of Mount Desert Island, the Blue

Hill peninsula including Brooklin, Sedgwick, Deer Isle and Stonington, the northern Hancock County town of Otis, the coastal towns of Hancock, Sullivan, Gouldsboro and Winter Harbor in eastern Hancock County, and the Town of Bucksport in western Hancock County. One of the major areas served by the transit system is Acadia National Park and neighboring village centers. The Island Explorer features seven bus routes linking hotels, inns and campgrounds with destinations in Acadia National Park. Another attraction served by Downeast Transportation is Bar Harbor, a major tourist area southeast of Ellsworth. Service is provided on seven routes on alternate days of the week.

### **Board Organization and Structure**

In 1979, constituents in Hancock County, Maine decided to establish a public transportation system. That same year, Downeast Transportation Inc. was established as a Section 501(c)(3) corporation to provide environmentally sound public transportation services. Specifically, the system was chartered to provide:

- transportation services to individuals with disabilities, senior and low income citizens of Hancock County, Maine
- general public transportation
- transportation resource information and technical assistance to Hancock County residents, the Maine Department of Transportation, and other non-profit transportation companies; and

- contract for transportation services in adjacent areas.

A self-perpetuating board of directors was originally appointed by the system's incorporators to govern the organization. Focusing on policy-setting issues, the board:

- provides overall direction to the Corporation
- sets the operating policies of the Corporation
- promotes a comprehensive area-wide transportation system
- monitors and supervises the quality of transportation services provided
- assures that such services meet the identified transportation needs of the public
- employs, supervises and evaluates the work of the General Manager
- assists and participates in fundraising.
- reviews and approves the annual budget.

The board is comprised of nine members and two alternates, who serve three-year staggered terms. Board members may serve consecutive terms, and are responsible for filling board vacancies. Board meetings are held every other month and last for about two hours. Board structure informal, operating with two standing committees, the Executive and Island Explorer Committees. These committees meet on an as-needed basis. Board members receive a limited orientation and training, and receive no administrative support. Neither the chair nor board members are compensated or reimbursed for board-related service or expenses. The board does not conduct self-assessments or measure overall board effectiveness.

## **Characteristics of Board Membership**

The board is comprised of all Caucasian members (seven males and three females), which reflects the demographics of the county. The service area is less than one percent non-Caucasian.

Board membership is comprised of a cross-section of residents who are interested in transportation. There are currently 10 board members who are employed as follows:

- Campground Ferry Operations Manager
- National Park Superintendent
- Representative from “Friends of Acadia”
- Transit Planners
- Housewife
- Retirees

## **Board/CEO Interaction**

The relationship between the board and the General Manager is *like family*.

Management reports and financial statements are sent to board members in advance, therefore, meetings are relatively short. This was evidenced during the site visit, where the meeting agenda and packet had been mailed to the Board members in advance, and members appeared to have read the information prior to the meeting. The board meeting was extremely informal, with the General Manager leading most of the

discussion. Board members appeared to have a lot of confidence in its General Manager.

### **Perceptions of Effectiveness**

The General Manager is pleased with the effectiveness of the board. Although board members may become too focused on the day-to-day operation, the board works well as a team and *no one really punches his or her agenda on (the General Manager)*. However, the Board has only evaluated the General Manager twice in the past eight years. The Board and General Manager agreed that there is a need for the Board members to become more involved in raising funds to extend the length of time for service. The Board also noted the need for improved orientation and training of board members.

Board meeting attendance is typically good, however, there was a period when a quorum (5 members) was not met. One of the primary reasons for low attendance is the long distance some members have to travel to Ellsworth. The meetings are held in the transit system's administrative offices in Ellsworth. The board indicated that they were effective in meeting the needs of the individuals that they serve.



## **THE FORT WORTH TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY (THE “T”)**

### **FORT WORTH, TEXAS**

#### **APPOINTED BY ELECTED OFFICIALS BOARD**

The “T” serves a population of 504,000 in a service area of 294 square miles in Tarrant County and the City of Fort Worth. The “T” provides fixed route and demand response service with large and small transit buses and transit vans. In a joint venture with Dallas Area Regional Transit, the “T” built and operates the Trinity Railway Express (TRE) that connects the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth through northeast Tarrant County with a commuter train. The “T” provides well over 5 million trips a year with a fleet of 144 buses and vans and 66 contracted vehicles. Daily management of operations is contracted to a national management company.

#### **Board Organization and Structure**

The “T” was organized under the statutes of the state of Texas and has a nine member Board of Trustees. The members are appointed by the elected official of each of the eight districts within Tarrant County, and the Tarrant County Commissioner’s Court appoints one at-large member. The members serve a term of one to six one-year terms. There is full-time administrative support for the board. The board members meet twice per month for board business. One meeting, attended by “T” board members, management and staff, is used to develop a consent agenda for the business meeting. The budget is developed at meetings held in June and July.

An annual retreat is held to develop updates to the strategic plan. Board members, management and staff members attend the retreats. At the retreat, the board chairman designates committees and assigns members to standing and ad hoc committees that address key issues for the current fiscal year. The standing committees include the Executive Committee, the TRE Committee, consisting of three members, the Strategic Planning Implementation Committee, consisting of two members, and the Mobility Impaired Transportation Committee (MITC), consisting of two members.

### **Characteristics of Board Membership**

The board is comprised of eight men and one woman. The educational and employment backgrounds of the board are diverse and provide a broad range of talents: education, legal, human resource management, financial, executive, engineering and real estate. Six members are white, two are African Americans, and one is Hispanic.

### **Board/CEO Interaction**

The project team observed the “T” monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees. The meeting was attended by eight of nine board members. The Chairperson worked from consent agendas and the meeting moved at a good pace. The interactions between the CEO, “T” staff, and the board were orderly and respectful. It was obvious that a style

had evolved among the participants and each knew the role that she or he played in the process. It was clear that the CEO had set the agenda with clear input from the board.

### **Perceptions of Effectiveness**

- Board Commitment
- Chairperson's Leadership
- CEO/GM Leadership
- Receipt of Timely Information
- Clarity of the Board's Role; and
- Clarity of Management Expectations.

According to the "T" board, measuring effectiveness, orientation, and compensation has very little influence on board effectiveness. The board members felt strongly that effectiveness was measured by how much of the strategic plan was achieved.

Members felt that the public was keyed on the *quality of transit service* when judging board effectiveness, as well as fiscal responsibility. In their opinion, the impact of board effectiveness on the performance of the transit system was determined by an approved strategic plan derived in consultation with the community. Such a plan provides clear, unambiguous direction for the organization. Generally, the members felt an assessment would be a valuable contribution to the organization; but there was not necessarily a pressing need for an assessment. It was apparent that the board was comfortable with

the board's effectiveness, and felt strongly that establishing a strategic direction was their key mission.

## **Board Chair**

The board chair indicated that the CEO's leadership was essential to the success of the board and its effectiveness. At the "T", the CEO sets the agenda and is responsible for the level of communication and the information that the board receives. The chair acknowledged that it was only recently that he realized that he was responsible for evaluating the CEO and the management company. According to the chair, the strategic plan process focused the board on the key issues and their responsibilities, one of which was evaluating the CEO. It also encouraged an evaluation of the existing committee structure.

The chair recognized the importance of orientation, but described it as *boring*. He felt the learning curve for a new board member was from six to nine months. Currently, new members receive a PowerPoint presentation on the "T", staff briefings, facility tours and information on the enabling legislation and board by-laws. In the chair's opinion, the board could use help in making the orientation more attractive. He identified the importance of punctuality, readiness to contribute and work, commitment of time and talent, and preparation for meetings as measures of effective board members. The primary measure for an effective board, in his opinion, was attainment of strategic goals,

but not necessarily directly measuring the impact of board effectiveness on organizational effectiveness.

## **CEO**

According to the CEO, the recent focus on his evaluation evidenced a change in how the board viewed its role and structure. He considered orientation important, but not crucial to the effectiveness of the board. The monthly board workshops are a great tool for educating the board and developing a working relationship between the staff and the board members. The major obstacle to board effectiveness is the lack of direction for the organization, and the lack of clarity of the board's role. The CEO felt that the working relationship of the CEO and the board chair is a key factor in board effectiveness. Collective leadership is not effective. A strong chairperson is capable of adapting the leadership style to what is needed to effectively lead the other board members. The CEO described an effective board as one that: 1) works for the common good; 2) exhibits community spirit – no hidden agendas; and 3) advocates for business.

In the opinion of the CEO, a restructured meeting format and working relationship improved the relationship between the board, CEO and staff. This change was precipitated by the increasing complexity of the "T's" role in the community and community expectations. In the past the "T" had no strategic plan. It held one business meeting a month. Usually, these meetings would result in lengthy question and answer sessions, with little board action. About three years ago, the board hosted a retreat and

developed their first strategic plan, and introduced a new meeting format. The board, CEO and staff meet in a workshop to flesh out the issues and questions related to the agenda prior to the business meeting. A consent agenda is developed that results in an efficient board meeting with few issues or unanswered questions. In addition, the CEO felt that a by-product of the monthly workshops has been the education of the board and increased confidence in the staff.

## **KENOSHA TRANSIT**

### **KENOSHA, WISCONSIN**

#### **APPOINTED BY ELECTED OFFICIALS BOARD**

Kenosha Transit serves a population of over 84,000 persons within a 21 square mile service area. It has a fleet of 52 buses, six rail trolleys and provides service Monday through Saturday. With an annual budget of \$4.9 million, annual ridership is 210,000. Kenosha Transit is a municipal operation and part of the Department of Transportation of the City of Kenosha. The Director of Transportation serves as chief executive officer of the transit system, with reporting responsibility to the City Manager and seven-person citizen advisory board.

#### **Board Organization and Structure**

The Mayor of Kenosha with the consent of the City Council appoints the Kenosha Transit Board. The seven members are appointed for three-year terms. The board is strictly advisory and only makes recommendations to the City Council on matters of budget and policy. The Board meets monthly and is not compensated. However, unless there is an issue of concern, it is not unusual to go two months without a board meeting. There is no committee structure. The Director of Transportation and his Administrative Assistant provide staff support to the board.

## **Characteristics of Board Membership**

The board is all male and there are no minority members. The vocational composition of the board includes a retired bus driver, radio announcer, property owner, retired alderman, a CEO of a manufacturing firm, a retired public administrator, and a college professor.

## **Board/CEO Interaction**

There was general agreement among all parties that the board and Director of Transportation Chairperson have established a good working relationship and *consider themselves a team*.

## **Perceptions of Effectiveness**

According to six of the seven board members, the major influences on board effectiveness are:

- CEO/GM Leadership
- Board Commitment
- Board Knowledge of Transit



- Receipt of Timely Information
- Clarity of the Board's Role
- Chair's Leadership
- Board Political Responsiveness
- Dedicated Funding
- Receipt of Timely Information

According to the board members, orientation, committee structure, diversity and compensation have little to no influence on board effectiveness. However, they indicated that involving the board in external relations and planning could improve effectiveness. It appeared that board members wanted more of a role in developing plans and policy. Generally, the members identified providing the overall direction for the system and the quality of the transit service as the benchmark for board effectiveness.

As an advisory board, the transit board serves at the pleasure of the mayor and council as oversight for transit operations. The board has little impact on the performance of the Director of Transportation, because he is evaluated by the City Manager. The members are focused on the operation of the system, rather than strategic direction. There seemed to be a sense of frustration among the board members about their advisory, instead of governing role. They expressed concern that the advisory role prevents them from looking at the system strategically and focuses their input on operational issues.

Focusing on operational issues is problematic because of the lack of distinction between providing advice on operational issues and getting involved in managing the system. The chair emphasized the importance of not micromanaging the transit system, indicating that *transit system management was not the board's role, but up to the director.*

According to the chair, effective board members are committed; attend meetings, are prepared and are willing to contribute their knowledge and perspective at board meetings. He viewed orientation as helpful, but not a major influence on effectiveness. The work of the board is not measured. As an advisory board and not a center of accountability, it is difficult to measure effectiveness. The chair identified transit system performance, safety and budget adherence as indicators of board effectiveness.

## **REGIONAL TRANSIT DISTRICT (RTD)**

### **DENVER, CO**

#### **PUBLICLY ELECTED BOARD**

The Regional Transit District (RTD) is a public agency created in 1969 by the Colorado General Assembly. The RTD operates as a mass transportation system in a six-county service area, which includes all of Boulder, Denver and Jefferson Counties, and parts of Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties. Serving 42 municipalities in six counties, the RTD serves a population of 2.3 million. The transit agency provides service via 1,096 buses, 31 light rail vehicles and 186 vans. Annual ridership from July 2000 to June 2001 was 80,291,760, and the total operating budget for 2001 was \$262,129,000. The RTD has 2,656 employees.

#### **Board Organization and Structure**

The RTD is governed by a 15-member, publicly elected Board of Directors. Directors are elected for a four-year term, with elections staggered so that eight seats are open in one general election and seven in the next. The Board of Directors has its regular meetings on the third Tuesday of each month, with study sessions held the week before the regular Board meeting. The board's structure includes several standing and ad hoc committees:

### ***Standing Committees***

- Executive
- Financial/Administrative
- Legislative
- Operations
- Planning and Development
- Customer Service/Marketing

### ***Ad Hoc Committees***

- DBE Outreach Committee
- SE Corridor Committee
- Central Platte Valley Committee
- Access-a-Ride Committee
- New Transit Technologies Committee
- GM's Performance Evaluation Committee
- Southwest Light Rail Line Committee
- Re-districting Committee
- TransTeq Mall Shuttle Committee
- Mission Statement Committee
- DUT Committee
- West Corridor Committee

Two board retreats which focus on strategic planning and board development are held each year. Thirteen of the fifteen members participated in the last retreat. Generally, there is a good orientation and training process for new Board members.

### **Characteristics of Board Membership**

Board members represent a broad range of disciplines and skills. Occupations of the board members include:

- Architect
- Attorney
- Business Owner
- Coordinator for an Architectural Firm
- Exec. Administrative Assistant,/Marketing
- Manager of a Trade Association
- Managing Partner, Executive Search Firm
- Marketing Director, Engineering and Survey Firm
- Owner Of Appraisal Service Business
- Owner, Association Management and Public Opinion Research Business
- Owner, Nut and Fruit Franchise
- President, Business Consulting Firm
- Principal, Elementary School

- Retired District Court Judge
- Senior Manager, Colorado Dept. of Personnel/GSS
- Two Retirees

The board members are diverse in terms of occupations—business owners, architect, lawyer, former judge, etc.; however, there is little diversity in terms of ethnicity. Of the fifteen board members, only three are women, one Hispanic, and one African-American.

### **Board/CEO Interaction**

There appeared to be a good working relationship among the board members, and between the board and the General Manager. The board chair indicated that she has developed a good working relationship with the General Manager. She explained that the General Manager is very open and notifies her right away on issues that she needs to be aware of, *making sure that she has no surprises*. She believes that the Board is strategic, and does not micro-manage the General Manager. The General Manager was just as complimentary of the board and pleased with their positive working relationship. He explained that he has developed a personal relationship with almost all of the members. Responding immediately to board requests, he focuses on always trying to come up with a “win-win” outcome for the board and management.

There also appeared to be a high level of commitment among board members. All members were present for the board meeting, and nearly everyone was punctual. Each

month a different director chairs the study session prior to the regular board meeting. Having a non-officer chair the study session prior to the regular board meeting seemed to be a good idea for providing exposure and developing leadership for those board members. In spite of the study session, the board meeting was lengthy (due to the number of agenda items) and included an Executive session and dinner. The chair appeared to be democratic in her role, allowing all members to fully participate in the meeting. The Board packet, which was distributed prior to the meeting, included the agenda, action items, and was 83 pages in length.

## **Board Chair**

The board chair explained that the board has changed dramatically during the past four years. Within the prior board, there were four or five members who always kept things stirred up. Members were going directly to staff persons for actions. The current board members are much more civil and the atmosphere is more pleasant. She credits the current success with 1) listening; 2) not burning bridges; and 3) not taking personal credit for system improvements, but recognizing staff contributions. The issues that the board continues to wrestle are:

- Light rail
- Privatization
- Labor
- Growth and land use

- Redistricting

### **Perceptions of Effectiveness**

The board chair ranks the board an '8' on a 10-point scale in terms of effectiveness, based upon the following:

- Good outreach with stakeholders
- Solid committees
- Not getting bogged down in details
- Doing homework
- Trying to not be too parochial.

The General Manger scored the board as "9" out of 10 for effectiveness. Describing this board as *the best one ever*, he explained that the board has a shared vision and positive acceptance of the division of their responsibilities in terms of policy versus administration/operations. The current Board is one hundred percent pro-rail; with the previous Board there was a split on rail support. Prior to the current board, there was a lot of bad press and the RTD had a negative image in the community. The current situation has changed significantly and, as a result, the RTD is getting positive press.



## **SALEM AREA MASS TRANSIT DISTRICT (CHERRIOTS)**

### **SALEM, OREGON**

#### **PUBLICLY ELECTED BOARD**

Cherriots serves a population of 160,000 in a service area of 70 square miles. Cherriots provides fixed route and demand response service with a fleet of 50 buses. Cherriots provides service on weekdays and Saturdays. Sunday service is not available. The annual operating budget is about \$8.1 million.

#### **Board Organization and Structure**

The Salem Mass Transit District is organized under the Oregon Statute. There are seven board members, who are publicly elected from within the mass transit district. The four-year terms are staggered so that three seats are up every election. The Cherriots staff provides staff support to the board. The board meets once a month.

#### **Characteristics of Board Membership**

The vocational make-up of the board consists of a mayor, a small businessperson, a retired police officer, a schoolteacher, a school administrator, a former Assistant Secretary of State for Oregon, current professor of journalism, a neighborhood activist and a member of State Department of Conservation and Development. There is one woman and no minorities on the board.

## **Board/CEO Interaction**

The study team observed a monthly Cherrriots Board meeting on October 9, 2001. The board works from a consent agenda and dispatches agenda items relatively quickly. Workshops are conducted in preparation for the monthly meeting. The workshops are designed to address time-consuming issues of concern prior to the regular board meeting. Staff is available to provide details and to assist in the discussion of the issues presented. As a result, the workshops have served to improve the relationship between the staff and board. The board seems to have a high level of confidence in the transit system staff. The members, too, appeared very knowledgeable of transit and the issues. The CEO sets the meeting agenda based on the agreed-upon strategic direction.

The CEO needs to focus the board, and the board needs to focus the CEO – a reciprocal need. The CEO said it is essential that they work together as a team. The CEO works with the chairperson to review the agenda before each board meeting, and anticipates issues that may arise with other board members. Before each board meeting the CEO meets with each board member. To help board members be stronger in the community, the CEO invites board members to lunch for education by staff on key issues.

The CEO indicated that he enjoyed an excellent working relationship with the Board Chairperson. He said he generally uses the Board Chairperson as a *sounding board* to avoid any surprises for the board. The board respects him for his knowledge.

### **Perceptions of Effectiveness**

Six of the seven board members identified influences on the board's effectiveness:

- Board Commitment,
- CEO/GM Leadership,
- Receipt of Timely Information,
- Clarity of the Board's Role, and
- Chair's Leadership
- Board Political Responsiveness

The least influential factors were identified as 1) board orientation; 2) committee structure, and 3) compensation.

### **Board Members**

As elected board members, it appeared that the board members have a clear focus on the community and are fashioning a plan to meet its needs. The board members were especially focused on strategic planning, providing direction, excellence in service, and

fiscal accountability. Board members identified three areas that needed improvement as external relations, planning, and information.

According to the members present, they believe that the public measures their effectiveness by how well they provide service and their fiscal stewardship. They also indicated that they were measured by how well they establish a strategic direction.

Although an assessment is not conducted, board members believed it would be a very beneficial experience for Cherriots to do an annual self-assessment. They saw the need for a self-assessment as a way to determine how well they were focused on the transit system's mission. The board members, though elected to represent their respective districts, appeared to be concerned with and focused on the system as a whole.

### **Board Chair**

The board chair viewed the CEO's leadership as the focal point and guide for the board. In his opinion, the CEO sets the organizational goals on which he is evaluated annually by the board. During the annual review of the organization, the CEO is evaluated by each of the board members. A consensus evaluation is then developed from the individual evaluations. The CEO develops goals for the organization for the next year for which he will be evaluated at the completion of the following year. According to the chair, management and staff drive the monthly meeting agendas. Although the board does not evaluate itself; as elected board members, the public indirectly conducts

evaluations. Community involvement and responsiveness are the keys to the success of the board.

The chair described the importance of board orientation as *overrated*. As publicly elected officials, board members are required to do their homework, be familiar with the issues affecting Cherrits, and how they might make a difference with their service. He also thought that the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) was a great source of education for board members.

In November 1999, the board developed a set of values and a code of conduct that answers “What Makes an Effective Board?” In this document, the board identified the following aspects of an effective board:

- Diligence and Commitment
- Listening and Communicating with an Open Mind
- Trust and respectful Behavior
- Efficient Conduct
- Team Work
- Leadership and Stewardship

Every two years the composition of the board changes because of the staggered terms of board members. The chair viewed the elections as an opportunity to obtain new ideas. Although the chair has primary responsibility for committee assignments, board

members indicate their committee preferences to encourage involvement and commitment of their time, talents and contacts. The work of the board is reviewed every other July 1<sup>st</sup>. The chair indicated that he measures board effectiveness by:

- attainment of their annual goals and follow through on their strategic plan
- response to new challenges and opportunities
- degree of mutual respect and comity on the Board.

The chair emphasized community involvement as the key to obtaining and maintaining financial support through local tax levies. The chair was very focused on setting a strategic direction and getting the most from the board by creating an excellent working environment for them.

## **CEO**

According to the CEO, election pre-qualifies the board members' interest and ability to serve on the board. There is no formal orientation process, but board members are encouraged to speak up if they need additional information. He allocated much of his time to working with board members and encouraging them to work with each other. He was very concerned about educating board members and finding ways to enhance their commitment to their jobs. In his opinion, to create an effective board, it is essential to foster excellent working relationships, minimize internal conflicts, and encourage respect. There is a need for a creative tension – getting board members out into the

community to send a clear message of their commitment. Regarding board assessments, he indicated that at retreats they always asked, *how well are we doing?*

## **SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY (SEPTA)**

**PHILADELPHIA, PA**

### **APPOINTED BY ELECTED OFFICIALS BOARD**

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) serves the Greater Philadelphia urbanized area, which has a population of 4,222,211. The SEPTA service area encompasses 2,174 square miles and a population of 3,728,909. This area includes five counties served by SEPTA. In 2000, SEPTA served 317,254,707 passengers (annual unlinked trips). Annual operating expenses were \$680,075,657. SEPTA is a multi-modal agency which provides the following transportation services:

- Bus
- Commuter rail
- Demand response
- Heavy rail
- Light rail
- Trolleybus

Between 1988 and 1996, SEPTA ridership declined 21 percent, representing a loss of nearly 200,000 daily trips on the transportation system region-wide. Compounding the ridership losses, an escalating operating deficit, calculated to increase by at least \$192 million for the years 1999 through 2003, jeopardizes the viability of the organization.



## **Board Organization and Structure**

Elected officials appoint the SEPTA board members. Philadelphia and the surrounding suburban counties appoint two members each, the State house and Senate majority leaders and the governor each appoint one. This arrangement gives the suburbs a predominant voice in matters relating to the Authority. Regular and special meetings are held monthly. The board uses a committee structure. Most of the work of the board is conducted in the Administrative and Operations Committee, which meets the week prior to the regular board meetings.

## **Characteristics of Board Membership**

The composition of the board is unusual because the majority of the members represent the County, not the City of Philadelphia. The Board is comprised of elected officials, business and laypersons. Two of the thirteen members are female and two are African Americans.

## **Board/CEO Interaction**

Board members appeared to be committed to the task. The General Manager described a very positive working relationship with the board. He has both a personal and business relationship with the board members. Board meetings are typically short; the meeting observed lasted 15 minutes.

## **Perceptions of Effectiveness**

There is no formal training for board members, but in terms of effectiveness, the General Manager ranks the board a “9” out of 10. The top three reasons for his rankings are:

- Strong support of management
- Strong support of management’s agenda
- Assistance in soliciting external support for the agency
- Fundraising

The general manger identified the following areas for improvement: 1) measuring its own effectiveness; and 2) annual evaluation of the General Manager.

## **Summary**

The case studies illustrated wide variance in transit board organization, structure and operation. The systems studied differ, not only in selection method, but some operated in an informal manner, while others were formal organizations. Roles and duties range from policy-setting and strategic planning to providing advice that may or may not be taken. All of the boards hold monthly meetings, but for some, these meetings are a formality. The real work is conducted in committee meetings. Other boards reported not holding scheduled monthly meetings because of poor attendance or *no issues to*

*discuss.* Regardless of such differences, all described committed members, positive working relationships between the boards and top transit system management, and for the most part, effective boards for their respective transit systems.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

There is considerable diversity in the characteristics, organization and operation of public transit policy boards, as well as what constitutes transit board effectiveness. This research was undertaken to provide data and information on public transit governance and insight into transit board effectiveness. Three methods of data collection were used in achievement of the research objectives: a national study of transit CEO/general managers and board chairs, focus groups on transit board effectiveness and case studies of selected transit systems. This section reviews the study's findings that provide information on the characteristics, organization and operation of public transit boards, and perceptions of effectiveness. The chapter concludes with recommendations for additional research.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The information presented was collected from the national survey, five focus groups with transit board members and support staff and six selected case studies. The national survey yielded 254 responses, 177 surveys returned from transit CEOs and 77 from transit board chairs. Collectively these surveys yielded information from 213 transit systems. The survey response represents a 50 percent return rate of the surveys distributed, 52 percent of the public transit systems that are APTA members

and 32 percent of the entire population of U.S. public transit systems. These systems range in size from those serving populations of over 1 million to areas with populations less than 50,000. Generally, the responses are considered representative of the largest transit systems and under-representative of the smallest systems.

### **Transit System Characteristics**

Transit system responses were geographically dispersed across all APTA regions.

Although all transportation modes were represented, 85 percent of the responses were from transit systems that provide bus and ADA paratransit service. The responses were predominately from transit systems in urban areas, and those that had at least source of local dedicated transit funding. Sales and property taxes lead the list of funding types.

### **Transit Board Chair Characteristics**

The majority of the board chairs who responded to the survey have served at least four years; over half have served at least seven years; and 42 percent have served on their boards for 10 years or more. Being asked to serve by an elected official, community commitment, and interest were almost equally important in determining why people serve on public transit boards. Most board chairpersons described their occupations as professionals, business owners or elected officials. Seventeen percent of the board chairs who responded are retirees. Although approximately one-half of the board chairs

indicated that they did not use the public transit system, 42 percent described their understanding of public transit issues as *very good*.

## **Organization and Composition of Transit Boards**

The organization and composition of public transit boards are usually specified in the enabling legislation and/or by-laws.

### ***Selection Method***

Appointment to the transit board by elected officials was the most common board selection method reported, however, there was wide variation in the methods and appointing bodies. The second largest category was boards comprised of elected officials who, as part of their official duties, also serve as the transit board. Publicly elected boards only represented about three percent of the responses and eleven percent of the transit systems that responded do not have transit policy boards. The types of board selection methods reported include:

- Appointment by elected officials
- Appointment by non-elected officials
- Appointment by joint powers authorities
- Elected official boards
- Mixed boards

- Publicly elected boards
- Transportation advisory boards

### ***Size***

Generally there is a relationship between transit system size and board size, but most boards are comprised of seven to ten members. The average board size is nine members.

### ***Length of Service***

The length of board member terms varies greatly, both in terms of number of years and re-appointments, but most board members serve terms of three or four years.

### ***Demographics***

The majority of transit boards are comprised of white males. Ninety percent of the transit boards that responded have at least one female board member, however, males are three times as likely to be selected for a transit board as females. The research results also suggest that in some cases, transit boards may not reflect the diversity of their communities. Approximately one-half of the respondent transit systems reported having at least one African-American board member. About one-quarter reported having at least one Hispanic board member. Only five percent reported having at least one

Asian board member, and one transit system reported having one Native American board member. Individuals with disabilities are under-represented on public transit boards; three-fourths of the transit systems that responded have no board members with disabilities.

## **Structure and Practices of Transit Boards**

Board structure and practices include new board member orientation, committee structure, administrative support and compensation.

### ***New Member Orientation***

Ninety percent of the respondent board chairs said that they received some form of new member orientation, though usually informal and unstructured. For the most part, this “briefing” was usually a single meeting with the CEO and/or senior staff. The responses were almost equally split about the importance of board orientation. In light of the fact that so many board members do not use public transit and knowledge of transit is not a prerequisite for board membership, most respondents viewed orientation as important. Others indicated that orientation is not as important since members *learn as they go along or should speak up and ask when they don't know something.*



## ***Meetings***

Monthly board meetings are the norm in the respondent transit boards. Boards of larger transit systems tend to meet more frequently and to have more standing committees that meet more frequently. Smaller systems tend to have fewer standing committees and to combine two or more functions into each committee.

## ***Committee Structure***

Most boards use a committee structure. In some boards, most of the work is actually conducted in specific committees, contentious or difficult issues are resolved to produce a consent agenda for the regularly scheduled board meeting. The most common standing committees are Executive, Finance/Budget, Human Resources, Planning, Legislative/Government Relations and Marketing. Ad hoc committees usually meet on an as needed basis.

## ***Compensation***

The majority of board members are not compensated for their time or reimbursed for expenses associated with their board participation. Only 31 out of 213 transit systems compensate board members for their time or reimburse expenses for board service. Only ten boards pay compensation for attending committee meetings. Compensation is usually limited to the citizen members of the board; most elected officials are paid

salaries in their elected roles, which include their participation as transit board members. When board members do receive compensation, it is most likely to be \$50.00 per full board meeting, primarily for time only. Most board chairs do not receive more compensation than their board members receive.

### ***Administrative Support***

Most boards have regular but not necessarily full-time administrative support; the most common source is the CEO/GM's own administrative staff. Smaller systems have less support than larger systems do.

### **Transit Board Roles and Duties**

Eighty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that their role is strictly policy setting, and not managing day-to-day operations. Although, board members repeatedly stressed the importance of not micro-managing transit systems, they acknowledged that the lines of policy and management are often blurred. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the difference between the two roles. Board members need to clearly understand their roles as policy makers to avoid such confusion. In most systems, the primary board activities involve budget approval, CEO selection and establishing organizational priorities. The most time consuming responsibilities were identified as establishing organizational priorities, service policies and standards, budget approval, strategic planning, and fiscal oversight.

The leadership of the board chair was considered very important. However, in relationship to other board members, most respondents described their role as chair as “a facilitator” who moderates meetings and helps the board to work effectively. Board chairs are usually the primary spokesperson and liaison with the CEO and appointing bodies.

### **Transit Board Effectiveness**

The discussion on transit board effectiveness is multi-faceted. Transit CEOs and board chairs shared their opinions on assessments, ratings, influential factors, and suggestions for improving, characteristics, and measures to consider when evaluating transit board effectiveness.

### ***Assessments***

The majority of transit systems do not measure board effectiveness; only one-third of the boards conduct any type of evaluation to determine their effectiveness. Of those that do measure effectiveness, it is usually an informal self-assessment. Sometimes it can be as informal as asking, *Did we achieve our goals this year?* Only 10 percent of the respondents reported that they hire consultants to evaluate their performance. Systems that conduct assessments do so on an annual basis.

### ***Ratings of Effectiveness***

Most CEOs rated their boards as *very effective* on political support; *effective* on funding, planning, transit image and professionalism, and *somewhat effective* on ridership growth. The majority rated their boards as *effective* on overall transit governance. Very few CEOs rated their boards as *ineffective* or *very ineffective* on overall transit governance.

Board chairs tended to rate their board's effectiveness in overall transit governance as effective rather than very effective. Few rated it as ineffective. Board chair ratings for performance criteria and professionalism were: ridership growth, *somewhat effective*, political support, *very effective*. Funding, planning, transit image and professionalism were rated as *effective*.

### ***Influences on Effectiveness***

Leadership provided by the transit CEO or General Manager has a strong to very strong influence on how the board operates. No significant differences exist in CEO and board chairperson ratings of influence items. They agree substantially that commitment is very important and compensation is least important.

Both groups viewed the board's receipt of timely information as a strong influence on board effectiveness. Clarity of role, clarity of management expectations, and board member's knowledge of transit also had a strong influence. Least important was board

orientation. The only significant difference in communication and information variables occurred with orientation: board chairpersons were much more likely than CEOs to rate this influence on board effectiveness as strong.

Both CEOs and chairpersons were likely to say that evaluation of the CEO/GM has a strong influence on board effectiveness but “measuring board effectiveness” has a somewhat weak influence (primarily because most do not conduct assessments). A significant difference was found between CEO and board chairperson responses: Chairpersons were much more likely to rate the impact of this function toward the very strong/strong end of the scale than were their CEOs.

### ***Improving Transit Board Effectiveness***

The CEOs’ suggestions for improving board effectiveness include: quality improvement strategies, such as measuring performance and finding ways to enhance board member commitment and time allotted for board work; improving composition and structure by broadening diversity and streamlining committee structures; Engaging in strategic and long-range planning; and improving information, communication, and knowledge, in terms of board member experience with and knowledge of transit.

Board chairpersons suggested that board effectiveness could be improved if individuals were more diverse, more committed, and had better knowledge of transit. They also

suggested that boards should have more autonomy and authority, as well as better communication with external agencies.

### ***Characteristics of Effective Board Members***

The following characteristics were identified as characteristics of effective board members:

- Advocate for the Community
- Committed to Public Transit
- Focused
- Knowledgeable
- Open Communication
- Political
- Prepared
- Team Player/Consensus Builder
- Understand the Board's Role

### ***Characteristics of Effective Transit Boards***

The following were identified as characteristics of effective transit boards:

- Achieves Goals

- Assesses Progress
- Balanced
- Cohesive Group
- Commitment
- Educates
- Focuses On Policy
- Good Communication
- Good Relationship with CEO
- Helps to Improve Transit System Performance
- Increases Revenue
- Knowledgeable
- Politically Astute
- Strategic
- Strong Chair

### ***Measures to Assess Transit Board Effectiveness***

According to the research results, the following criteria should be considered when evaluating transit board effectiveness:

1. Achieves Strategic Goals
2. Appearance of Equipment
3. Balanced Budget
4. Increased Ridership
5. Labor/Management Relationship
6. Meets Community Public Transit Needs
7. Morale/Attitudes of Employees
8. Public Opinion of Board and Transit System
9. Quality of Transit Service
10. Reputation with Media
11. Revenue
12. Transit System Performance
13. Working Relationship among Board Members
14. Working Relationship with General Manager/CEO and Other Staff

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH**

The following suggestions for further study are provided to address several of the issues raised in this research effort.



## **Expanded Transit CEO/Board Chair Survey**

In order to obtain an even more definitive understanding of the operation of public transit boards nationwide, a comprehensive survey of the entire population of U.S. public transit systems could be conducted. The research would request responses from all CEOs and transit board chairs to examine their organization and board practices. Particular attention would be paid to perceptions and ratings of transit board effectiveness.

## **Survey Appointing Bodies and Customers**

The responses of this study are limited to those of the Transit CEOs, board chairs and support staff. To obtain a more balanced perspective, similar research could be conducted with the appointing bodies and customers who use the services.

## **Develop Transit Board Assessment Tool to Evaluate Effectiveness**

Using the baseline data, information, perceptions and suggested measures for determining transit board effectiveness, research should be conducted to develop and test a transit board assessment instrument. Such a tool would enable transit boards to evaluate their performance on a regular basis.

## **Orientation and Training**

A best practices manual is needed to provide information and suggestions for developing comprehensive and meaningful orientation sessions for new board members. Training and dissemination strategies should be designed to ensure wide dissemination in the industry.

## **Research on Board Processes**

Today, transit and other public policy boards are finding their actions closely monitored by customers and other stakeholders. Therefore, future research is needed that focuses on the actual *behavior* of the board, and what it needs to perform its duties and responsibilities more effectively.

## REFERENCES

1. Mitchell, J. "Representation in Government Boards and Commissions." *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (1997) pp. 160-168.
2. Copas, T.L. & Pennock, H.A. "Transit Boards—Composition, Rules, and Procedures." *National Highway Research Program Synthesis 75*, Transportation Research Board, Washington DC (1981).
3. Ward, R.D. (1998). "The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Corporate Board." *The CEO Refresher*. Retrieved November 8, 2000 from the World Wide Web: <http://refresher.com/board>.
4. Hohn. (1997). Board Governance: Balance is The Key. *Directorship*. (From [Business Source Premier on-line]: EBSCO Publishing [Producer and Distributor].) Retrieved February 18, 2001 from the World Wide Web: [http:// www.ehost@epnet.com](http://www.ehost@epnet.com).
5. Steinberg & Bromilow. (1996, November). "Effective Boards: Making The Dynamics Work." *Corporate Governance and the Board: What Works Best*. Retrieved May 15, 2001 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.boardmember.com/network.pl>
6. Whitman. (1995, September/October). "Using Board Guidelines As A Strategic Tool." *Corporate Board*, pp. 1-6. (From [Business Source

- Premier on-line]: EBSCO Publishing [Producer and Distributor].) Retrieved April 18, 2001 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.ehostvgw11@epnet.com>.
7. Ward, R.D. (1998). "Board Basics." *Corporate Board Member*. Retrieved November 8, 2000 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.boardmember.com/network/index>.
  8. Horn, K.H. "Transit Authority Boards of Directors: Membership, Organization, Functions and Performance," UMTA, Washington, DC, Pennsylvania Transportation Institute, University Park (1976).
  9. Holmes, R.A., Brown, I., & Davis, E.L. "A Comparative Analysis of the Roles, Operations and Functions of the MARTA and Dade County Boards of Directors," UMTA, Washington, D.C., (1984).
  10. Wilson, N.H. & McCollum, B. "Working with Transit Boards of Directors."
  11. Paaswell, R., Sander, R., Peyrebrune, H., Bolton, M., & Schaller, B. A "Study of Transit Governance, U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C. (1999).

12. Kristie, J. (1999, February). "Board Trends 1970s to the 1990s: "The More Things Change . . . ." *Directors & Boards*. Retrieved May 15, 2001 from the World Wide Web:  
<http://www.directorsandboards.com/brdtrnds.html>
13. George, W. W. (2000, October). "It's Time To Improve Corporate Governance." *National Association of Corporate Directors*. Retrieved November 8, 2000 from the World Wide Web:  
<http://www.meditronic.com/newsroom/mgmt.speech>.
14. The Support Center. (1994). "What Are Some Ways To Strengthen The Leadership Role of The Board?" Retrieved April 2001 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.nonprofits.org/npofaq.html>
15. Felton & Hudnut. (1995). "Building A Stronger Board:" *McKinsey Quarterly*, pp. 162-176. (From [Business Source Premier on-line]: EBSCO Publishing [Producer and Distributor].) Retrieved April 18, 2001 from the World Wide Web: [http:// www.ehostvgw10@epnet.com](http://www.ehostvgw10@epnet.com).
16. Korn/Ferry International. (1998). "Twenty 'Best Practices.'" *Twenty Best Practices To Improve Board Performance*. Retrieved April 18, 2001 from the World Wide Web <http://boardmember.com/network>.

17. Stuart. (1999). "SSBI Report: 1999 Director Compensation Trends."  
*Corporate Board Member*. Retrieved March 18, 2000 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.boardmember.com/network/index.pl>
18. National Association of Corporate Directors (1996). New Expectations For Directors. *BusinessWeek*. Retrieved March 18, 2001 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.businessweek.com>.
19. Miller, J., Fletcher, K. & Abzug, R. (1999). *Perspective on Non-Profit Board Diversity*. National Center for Non-Profit Boards, Washington, D.C.
20. Furr & Furr. (2000). "Your Board: Dynamic, Difficult or Detrimental."  
*Corporate Board Member*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: January 18, 2001: [http:// www.boardanddirectors.com/bdarticle1.htm](http://www.boardanddirectors.com/bdarticle1.htm)
21. Furr & Furr. (2000). Your Board's Approach to its Responsibilities: Resting on Laurels or Raising the Bar. *Corporate Board Member*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: January 18, 2001: [http:// www.boardanddirectors.com/bdarticle3.htm](http://www.boardanddirectors.com/bdarticle3.htm)
22. Hall, P.D. "A History of Non-Profit Boards in the United States," National Center for Non-Profit Boards, Washington, D.C. (1997).

23. Ingram, R.T. "Ten Basic Responsibilities of Non-Profit Boards," National Center for Non-Profit Boards, Washington, D.C. (1996) pp.
24. Axelrod, N. "The Growing Stakes for Good Governance." *Association Management*, Vol. 49, No. 38, (1997).
25. Walker, L. (1995, September). "Governing Board, Know Thyself." *Trustee*, pp. 14-20. (From [Business Source Premier on-line]: EBSCO Publishing [Producer and Distributor].). Retrieved May 8, 2001 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.ehost@epnet.com>.

APPENIDX A



5905 Fox Glen Court  
Elkridge, MD 21075  
(410) 579-1395

December 11, 2000

Sandra M. Foster, Vice Chair  
Governing Boards Committee  
President, METRO Regional Transit Authority  
2217 Thurmont Road, Akron, OH 44313

Dear Ms. Foster:

SIMON & SIMON Research Associates, Incorporated, in conjunction with Will Scott and Associates, Prangley & Company, and Group Dimensions, under the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP), is conducting Project H-24, Public Transit Policy Boards: Organization and Characteristics. The objective of this project is to develop a reference guide that will provide guidance to transit board members, transit executive officers/general managers and appointing bodies about transit board size, structure, organization, and composition. The guide will also identify characteristics of board effectiveness.

A major task of this project is to conduct a national survey of public transit agencies to identify the characteristics and organization of their transit boards. The enclosed questionnaire is intended to obtain information about your transit board and your perspective on transit board effectiveness. The questionnaire is being sent to transit executive officers/general managers and to board chairpersons' agencies.

We realize that you receive many inquiries like this and they require some of your time, but the success of this project depends on your input. Therefore, we sincerely appreciate your efforts in sharing your experience and knowledge about public transit policy boards.

**Please e-mail or mail your survey by December 20, 2000 to:**

**Norman T. London, Co-Director,  
Group Dimensions, P. O. Box 65, Barrington, RI 02806  
(Or via e-mail to [normlondon@aol.com](mailto:normlondon@aol.com))**

Thank you in advance for your valuable assistance with this important research endeavor.

Sincerely,

Rosalyn M. Simon, Ph.D., President/CEO  
SIMON & SIMON Research and Associates, Inc.

Howard Silver, Chair  
APTA Transit Board Committee



**APPENDIX B**

**TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD SURVEY**

TCRP project H-24

Public Transit Policy Boards: Organization and Characteristics

**Transit Organization General Manager/Executive Officer**

Your Name: Mr. Mrs. Ms. Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

Your Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of transit system: \_\_\_\_\_

Transit system address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address City State Zip Code

PH: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**I. Describe Your Transit System:**

*Please place an "x" in the most appropriate box or fill in the blank, as appropriate.*

1. Type of transit system (check all that apply): Bus Rail Light Rail  
Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. Service Area: Under 50,000 50,000-199,999 200,000-999,999 1,000,000 or greater
3. Type of Community (check all that apply): Urban Suburban Rural
4. Number of fixed route bus fleet vehicles operated during peak hours: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Does your transit system have a dedicated local funding source? Yes No
6. If yes, what type of tax? Sales Property Earnings Gas Other \_\_\_\_\_

**II. Describe Your Transit Board:**

*Please place an "x" next to the most appropriate box or fill in the blank, as appropriate.*

1. How are board members selected?  
Appointed by elected officials Appointed by non-elected officials Elected
2. Number of members on your board: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Length of board member terms: \_\_\_\_\_
4. At this moment, how many of your board members are:  
Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Persons with Disabilities \_\_\_\_\_  
White (non-Hispanic) \_\_\_\_\_ White (Hispanic) \_\_\_\_\_ African American \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B**

Non-White Hispanic \_\_\_\_ Asian \_\_\_\_ Other (Please describe here) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Are board members provided with an orientation when they join the board? Yes No  
Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

6. How often does the board meet? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Does your board have committees? Yes No

8. *If yes, please check each committee name:* *How often does each one meet?*

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Executive Committee              | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Finance/Budget                   | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing                        | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Planning                         | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Legislative/Government Relations | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources                  | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                     | _____ |

9. Does the board have administrative support? Yes  No

10. *If, yes, please check the appropriate box*  
Full-time board staff Part-time board staff Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. Are board members compensated for participating in full board meetings? Yes No

12. *If yes, how much per full board meeting? \$ \_\_\_\_\_*  
Expenses Only Time Only Expenses and Time

13. Does the board chair receive more compensation than the members? Yes No

14. Are board members paid for participating in committee meetings? Yes No

15. *If yes, how much per committee meeting? \$ \_\_\_\_\_*  
Expenses Only Time Only Expenses and Time

**III. Describe Your Transit Board Roles and Duties:**

*Please place an "x" next to the most appropriate box or fill in the blank, as appropriate.*

1. How would you describe your transit board's *primary* role:

- Policy-setting
- Day-to-day management
- Combination of policy-setting and day- to-day management
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please place an "x" to the left of *all* activities in which your board is involved "hands on".

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> CEO Selection              | <input type="checkbox"/> Labor Contract/Labor Relations          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CEO Performance Evaluation | <input type="checkbox"/> Establishing Service Policies/Standards |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning         | <input type="checkbox"/> Establishing Fares                      |

**APPENDIX B**

- Purchasing/Procurement
  - Contracting
  - Overall Fiscal Control
  - Fiduciary/Budget Approval
  - Legal Oversight
  - Liaison with Elected Officials
  - Setting Organizational Priorities
  
  - Liaison with Funding Organizations
  - Media and Public Relations
  - Industry Relations
- Community Relations (General)
  - Community Relations (Business)
  - Marketing
  - Funding/Fundraising
  - Advocacy
  - Day-to-Day Operations
  - FTA Rules and Regulations
  - ADA Requirements
  - Technical Enhancements
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. From the list in question 17, above, please list in rank order the top five activities that take up most of the board's time.

- i. \_\_\_\_\_
- ii. \_\_\_\_\_
- iii. \_\_\_\_\_
- iv. \_\_\_\_\_
- v. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Please describe the power of the board chairperson/president:  
In relationship to the board?

---

---

---

In relationship to the general manager?

---

---

---

**IV. Describe Your Transit Board Effectiveness:**

*Please place an "x" next to the most appropriate box or fill in the blank, as appropriate.*

1. Is transit board effectiveness measured? Yes No

2. *If yes, who performs the review? (Please check all that apply).*

- Board self-assessment
- Transit management
- Appointing body
- City/county/state government
- Elected officials
- Consultant
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. How often is effectiveness measured?

**APPENDIX B**

- Every year
- Every two years
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Using the scale below, how would you rate your transit board's effectiveness on the following items? *Please insert the appropriate number to the left of each item.*

<i>Very Effective</i>	<i>Effective</i>	<i>Somewhat Effective</i>	<i>Somewhat Ineffective</i>	<i>Ineffective</i>	<i>Very Ineffective</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| a. _____ Overall transit governance | e. _____ Strategic/long range planning |
| b. _____ Ridership growth           | f. _____ Transit image in community    |
| c. _____ Funding                    | g. _____ Overall board effectiveness   |
| d. _____ Political support          | h. _____ Overall board professionalism |

5. How would you rate the level of influence of the following factors on your transit board's effectiveness? *Please insert the appropriate number to the left of each item.*

<i>Very Strong</i>	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Somewhat Strong</i>	<i>Somewhat Weak</i>	<i>Weak</i>	<i>Very Weak</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Board size
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Board composition (types of disciplines)
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Board organization/structure
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Board committee structure
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Board compensation
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ Board diversity
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ Transit dedicated funding
- h. \_\_\_\_\_ Board political responsiveness
- i. \_\_\_\_\_ CEO/general manager leadership
- j. \_\_\_\_\_ Board chair leadership
- k. \_\_\_\_\_ Board orientation/training
- l. \_\_\_\_\_ Board commitment
- m. \_\_\_\_\_ Board knowledge of transit
- n. \_\_\_\_\_ Board involvement in strategic planning
- o. \_\_\_\_\_ Board receipt of accurate, timely information for decision-making
- p. \_\_\_\_\_ Clarity of board role
- q. \_\_\_\_\_ Clarity of management expectations
- r. \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluation of management performance
- s. \_\_\_\_\_ Measurement of board effectiveness

6. What two changes could help your board operate more effectively?

- i. \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B**

ii. \_\_\_\_\_

7. Please add any other comments:

---

---

---

---

\*\*\*\*\*

*Thank you for your time and ideas. Please mail, e-mail, or fax this form to:*

Dr. Norman London, Co-Director  
Group Dimensions  
P. O. Box 65  
Barrington, RI 02806

[normlondon@aol.com](mailto:normlondon@aol.com)  
401-354-6087

If you have questions about this survey, please call Dr. London at 401-354-4057.

**TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD SURVEY**  
TCRP project H-24  
Public Transit Policy Boards: Organization and Characteristics

**Transit Board Chairperson**

Your Name: Mr. Mrs. Ms. Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

Name of transit system: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

Street Address	City	State	Zip Code
----------------	------	-------	----------

PH: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**I. About You:**

*Please place an "x" next to the most appropriate box or fill in the blank, as appropriate.*

1. Your current position on the board: Chairperson President Vice-Chairperson  
Vice-President Other officer Non-Officer board member
  
2. Number of years you have served on the board: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How were you placed on the board? Appointed Elected  
*If appointed*, by whom were you appointed? Mayor City Council  
County Commission Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Your employment status:  
Professional employee Business owner Elected official Homemaker  
Public sector administrator Not employed Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What is the main reason you serve on the transit board?  
Asked to serve by mayor/elected official Part of my community commitment Interest  
in public transit  Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Do you currently ride the transit system in your community? Yes No  
*If yes*, how often? \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. How would you rank your understanding of transit, overall?  
Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

**APPENDIX C**

**II. Describe Your Transit Board:**

*Please place an "x" next to the most appropriate box or fill in the blank, as appropriate.*

8. How are board members selected?  
Appointed by elected officials Appointed by non-elected officials Elected
9. Number of members on your board: \_\_\_\_\_ Length of board member terms: \_\_\_\_\_
10. At this moment, how many of your board members are:  
Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Persons with Disabilities \_\_\_\_\_  
White (non-Hispanic) \_\_\_\_\_ White (Hispanic) \_\_\_\_\_ African American \_\_\_\_\_  
Non-White Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_ Asian \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
10. Are board members provided with an orientation when they join the board? Yes No  
Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_
11. How often does the board meet? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Does your board have committees? Yes No
- | <i>If yes, please check each committee name:</i> | <i>How often does each one meet?</i> |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| _____ Executive Committee                        | _____                                |
| _____ Finance/Budget                             | _____                                |
| _____ Marketing                                  | _____                                |
| _____ Planning                                   | _____                                |
| _____ Legislative/Government Relations           | _____                                |
| _____ Human Resources                            | _____                                |
| _____ Other: _____                               | _____                                |
13. Does the board have administrative support? Yes  No  
*If, yes, please check the appropriate box*  
Full-time board staff Part-time board staff Other \_\_\_\_\_
14. Are board members compensated for participating in full board meetings? Yes No  
*If yes, how much per full board meeting? \$ \_\_\_\_\_*  
Expenses Only Time Only Expenses and Time
15. Does the board chair receive more compensation than the members? Yes No
16. Are board members paid for participating in committee meetings? Yes No  
*If yes, how much per committee meeting? \$ \_\_\_\_\_*  
Expenses Only Time Only Expenses and Time

**APPENDIX C**

**III. Describe Your Transit Board Roles and Duties:**

*Please place an "x" next to the most appropriate box or fill in the blank, as appropriate.*

16. How would you describe your transit board's *primary* role:

- Policy-setting
- Day-to-day management
- Combination of policy-setting and day- to-day management
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

17. Please place an "x" to the left of *all* activities in which your board is involved.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> CEO Selection                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Liaison with Funding Organizations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CEO Performance Evaluation              | <input type="checkbox"/> Media and Public Relations         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry Relations                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Labor Contract/Labor Relations          | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Relations (General)      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Establishing Service Policies/Standards | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Relations (Business)     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Establishing Fares                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Purchasing/Procurement                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Funding/Fundraising                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contracting                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Overall Fiscal Control                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Day-to-Day Operations              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fiduciary/Budget Approval               | <input type="checkbox"/> FTA Rules and Regulations          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Oversight                         | <input type="checkbox"/> ADA Requirements                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Liaison with Elected Officials          | <input type="checkbox"/> Technical Enhancements             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Setting Organizational Priorities       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                       |

18. From the list in question 17, above, please list in rank order the top five activities that take up most of the board's time.

- i. \_\_\_\_\_
- ii. \_\_\_\_\_
- iii. \_\_\_\_\_
- iv. \_\_\_\_\_
- v. \_\_\_\_\_

19. Please describe the power of the board chairperson/president:  
In relationship to the board?

---

---

---

In relationship to the general manager?

---

---

---



**APPENDIX C**

**IV. Describe Your Transit Effectiveness:**

*Please place an "x" next to the most appropriate box or fill in the blank, as appropriate.*

20. Is transit board effectiveness measured? Yes No

21. *If yes, who performs the review? (Please check all that apply).*

- Board self-assessment
- Transit management
- Appointing body
- City/county/state government
- Elected officials
- Consultant
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

22. How often is effectiveness measured?

- Every year
- Every two years
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

23. Using the scale below, how would you rate your transit board's effectiveness on the following items? *Please insert the appropriate number to the left of each item.*

<i>Very Effective</i>	<i>Effective</i>	<i>Somewhat Effective</i>	<i>Somewhat Ineffective</i>	<i>Ineffective</i>	<i>Very Ineffective</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. _____ Overall transit governance</li> <li>b. _____ Ridership growth</li> <li>c. _____ Funding</li> <li>d. _____ Political support</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e. _____ Strategic/long range planning</li> <li>f. _____ Transit image in community</li> <li>g. _____ Overall board effectiveness</li> <li>h. _____ Overall board professionalism</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

24. How would you rate the level of influence of the following factors on your transit board's effectiveness? *Please insert the appropriate number to the left of each item.*

<i>Very Strong</i>	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Somewhat Strong</i>	<i>Somewhat Weak</i>	<i>Weak</i>	<i>Very Weak</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Board size
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Board composition (types of disciplines)
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Board organization/structure
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Board committee structure
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Board compensation
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ Board diversity

**APPENDIX C**

- g. \_\_\_\_ Transit dedicated funding
- h. \_\_\_\_ Board political responsiveness
- i. \_\_\_\_ CEO/general manager leadership
- j. \_\_\_\_ Board chair leadership
- k. \_\_\_\_ Board orientation/training
- l. \_\_\_\_ Board commitment
- m. \_\_\_\_ Board knowledge of transit
- n. \_\_\_\_ Board involvement in strategic planning
- o. \_\_\_\_ Board receipt of accurate, timely information for decision-making
- p. \_\_\_\_ Clarity of board role
- q. \_\_\_\_ Clarity of management expectations
- r. \_\_\_\_ Evaluation of management performance
- s. \_\_\_\_ Measurement of board effectiveness

25. What two changes could help your board operate more effectively?

- i. \_\_\_\_\_
- ii. \_\_\_\_\_

26. Please add any other comments:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

*Thank you for your time and ideas. Please mail, e-mail, or fax this form to:*

Dr. Norman London, Co-Director  
Group Dimensions  
P. O. Box 65  
Barrington, RI 02806

[normlondon@aol.com](mailto:normlondon@aol.com)  
401-354-6087

If you have questions about this survey, please call Dr. London at 401-354-4057.

<b><u>Transit System Name</u></b>	<b><u>City</u></b>	<b><u>State</u></b>
Access Services	Los Angeles	CA
Alameda-Contra Costa Transit	Oakland	CA
Albany Transit System	Albany	GA
Alexandria Transit Company	Alexandria	VA
Altoona Metro Transit (AMTRAN)	Altoona	PA
Ames Transit Agency - CyRide	Ames	IA
Ann Arbor Transportation Authority	Ann Arbor	MI
AppalCART	Boone	NC
Area Transportation Authority of North Central Pennsylvania	Johnsonburg	PA
Athens Transit	Athens	GA
Atlantic Hudson, Inc.	Staten Island	NY
Bay Metro Transit	Bay City	GA
Ben Franklin Transit	Richland	WA
Berks Area Reading Transportation Authority	Reading	PA
Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority	Birmingham	AL
Blacksburg Transit	Blacksburg	VA
Bloomington Public Transportation Corporation	Bloomington	IN
Blue Water Area Transit	Port Huron	MI
Broward County Mass Transit	Pompano Beach	FL
Butler County Regional Transit Authority	Fairfield	OH
Butler Township/City Joint Municipal Transit Authority	Butler	PA
Cambria County Transit Authority (CAMTRAN)	Johnstown	PA
Capital Area Transit	Harrisburg	PA
Capital Area Transportation Authority (CATA)	Lansing	MI
Capital District Transportation Association	Oklahoma City	OK
Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority	Austin	TX
Central Connecticut Paratransit Service	Bristol	CT
Central New York Regional Transportation Authority	Syracuse	NY
Central Ohio Transit Authority	Columbus	OH
Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority	Oklahoma City	OK
Centre Area Transportation Authority	State College	PA
Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District	Urbana	IL
Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS)	Charlotte	NC
Chatham Area Transit	Savannah	GA
Chelan Douglas Link Transit	Wenatchee	WA
Chicago Transit Authority	Chicago	IL
Chittenden County Transportation Authority	Burlington	VT
Citizens Area Transit	Las Vegas	NV
City Bus of Greater Lafayette	Lafayette	IN
City of Fairfax ONE Bus System	Fairfax	VA
City of Fresno/Fresno Area Express (FAX)	Fresno	CA
City of Glendale Transit	Glendale	AZ
City of Kalamazoo Metro Transit System Transportation Department	Kalamazoo	MI
City of Modesto	Modesto	CA
City of Muscatine (MUSCABUS)	Muscatine	IA
City of Phoenix Transit System	Phoenix	AZ
City of Tallahassee Transit Authority (TALTRAN)	Tallahassee	FL
City Transit Management Company, Inc. (CITIBUS)	Lubbock	TX
CityLink Transit - Abilene Transit System	Abilene	TX
Clallam Transit System	Port Angeles	WA
Clark County Public Transportation Benefit Area (C-TRAN)	Vanocuver	WA

Community Action Transit System	Piketon	OH
Community Transit	St. Lucie	FL
Connecticut Department of Transportation	Newington	CT
Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority (RTA)	Corpus Christi	TX
CT Transit	Hartford	CT
Culver City Municipal Bus Lines	Culver City	CA
Dallas Area Rapid Transit	Dallas	TX
Delaware Area Transit Agency	Delaware	OH
Des Moines Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA)	Des Moines	IA
Downeast Transportation, Inc.	Ellsworth	ME
Duluth Transit Authority	Duluth	MN
Durham Area Transit Authority	Durham	NC
Eagle County Regional Transportation Authority	Gypsum	CO
East Chicago Transit	East Chicago	IN
Eastern Contra Costa Transit Authority	Antioch	CA
Escambia County Area Transit	Pensacola	FL
Fairfield/Suisun Transit	Fairfield	CA
Foothill Transit	West Covina	CA
Fort Worth Transportation Authority (The T)	Fort Worth	TX
Fresno County Rural Transit Agency	Fresno	CA
Gary Public Transportation Corporation	Gary	IN
Golden Empire Transit District	Bakersfield	CA
Golden Gate Bridge, Highway & Transportation District	San Francisco	CA
Great Falls Transit District	Great Falls	MT
Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority	Bridgeport	CT
Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority	Cleveland	OH
Greater Hartford Transit District	Hartford	CT
Greater Lynchburg Transit Company	Lynchburg	VA
Greater Peoria Mass Transit District	Peoria	IL
Hampton Roads Transit	Hampton	VA
Hawaii County Transit System	Hilo	HI
Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority	Tampa	FL
Indiannapolis Public Transportation Corporation (Indy Go)	Indianapolis	IN
Intercity Transit	Olympia	WA
InterUrban Transit Partnership (The Rapid)	Grand Rapids	MI
Iowa City Transit	Iowa City	IA
Jacksonville Transportation Authority	Jacksonville	FL
Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (KCATA)	Kansas City	MO
Kenosha Transit	Kenosha	WI
Kitsap Transit	Bremerton	WA
Knoxville Area Transit (KAT)	Knoxville	TN
LaCrosse Municipal Transit Utility	LaCrosse	WI
LAKETRAN	Grand River	OH
Lane Transit District	Eugene	OR
Laredo Metro, Inc. d/b/a El Metro	Laredo	TX
Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA)	Allentown	PA
Long Beach Transit	Long Beach	CA
Louisiana Transit Company, Inc.	Harahan	LA
Macon-Bibb County Transit Authority	Macon	GA
Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT)	Bradenton	FL
Marguerite	Stanford	CA
Maryland Mass Transit Administration (MTA)	Baltimore	MD

Mass Transportation Authority	Flint	MI
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)	Boston	MA
Meriden Transit District	Meriden	CT
Metro Regional Transit Authority (METRO RTA)	Akron	OH
Metro Transit	Minneapolis	MN
Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority	Atlanta	GA
Metropolitan Evansville Transit System	Evansville	IN
Metropolitan Transit Authority	Nashville	TN
Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County	Houston	TX
Metropolitan Tulsa Transit Authority	Tulsa	OK
Miami Valley Regional Transit Authority (RTA)	Dayton	OH
Mid Mon Valley Transit Authority	Charleroi	PA
Milwaukee County Transit System	Milwaukee	WI
Minnesota Valley Transit Authority	Burnsville	MN
Montebello Bus Lines	Montebello	CA
Monterey-Salinas	Monterey	CA
Morris County Metro	Morristown	NJ
Mountain Line	Missoula	MT
MTA New York City Transit	New York	NY
MunicePublic Transportation Corporation	Munice	IN
New Jersey Transit Corporation (NJ TRANSIT)	Newark	NJ
Niagara Frontier Transit Metro System, Inc.	Buffalo	NY
North County TRANSIT DISTRICT	Oceanside	CA
Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD)	Chestertown	IN
Northern Virginia Transportation Commission	Arlington	VA
Norwalk Transit District (Wheels)	Norwalk	CT
OMNITRANS	San Bernadino	CA
Orange County Transportation Authority	Orange	CA
Pace Suburban Bus	Arlington Heights	IL
Paducah Transit Authority d.b.a. Paducah Area Transit System	Paducah	KY
Palm Beach County (PalmTran)	West Palm Beach	FL
Pierce Transit	Tacoma	WA
Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority	Clearwater	FL
Pioneer Valley Transit Authority	Springfield	MA
Plymouth Metrolink and Dial-a-Ride	Plymouth	MN
Port Arthur Transit (PAT)	Port Arthur	TX
Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority	Kent	OH
Potomac & Rappahannock Transportation Commission	Woodbridge	VA
Professional Transit Management, LTD. D/b/a Sun Tran	Tuscon	AZ
Red Rose Transit Authority	Lancaster	PA
Redding Area Bus Authority	Redding	CA
Regional Transportation Authority (RTA)	Chicago	IL
Regional Transportation District (RTD)	Denver	CO
Rhode Island Public Transit Authority	Providence	RI
Riverside Transit Agency	Riverside	CA
Rock Island County Metropolitan Mass Transit District (MetroLink)	Rock Island	IL
Rockford Mass Transit District	Rockford	IL
Sacramento Regional Transit District	Sacramento	CA
Saginaw Transit Authority Regional Services (STARS)	Saginaw	MI
Salem Area Mass Transit District	Salem	OR
San Diego Metropolitan Transit Development Board (MTDB)	San Diego	CA
San Diego Trolley, Inc.	San Diego	CA

San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART)	Oakland	CA
San Joaquin Regional Transit District	Stockton	CA
San Mateo County Transit District (SamTrans)	San Carlos	CA
Santa Clarita Transit	Santa Clarita	CA
Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District	Santa Cruz	CA
Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus	Santa Monica	CA
Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT)	Sarasota	FL
SLO Transit	San Luis Obispo	CA
South Bend Public Transportation Corporation (TRANSPO)	South Bend	IN
South Central Illinois Mass Transit District (SCT)	Centralia	IL
South Central Massachusetts Elderbus, Inc.	Charlton	MA
South Coast Area Transit (SCAT)	Oxnard	CA
Southeast Transportation Authority	Denver	CO
Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)	Philadelphia	PA
Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA)	Los Angeles	CA
Southwest Metro Transit	Eden Prairie	MN
Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority	Cincinnati	OH
Spokane Transit	Spokane	WA
SPORTRAN - City of Shreveport	Shreveport	LA
Springs Transit	Colorado Springs	CO
St. Cloud Metropolitan Transit Commission	St. Cloud	MN
Stark Area Regional Transit Authority	Canton	OH
SunLine Transit Agency	Thousand Palms	CA
The Gulf Coast Center Connect Transportation	Galveston	TX
The Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART)	Detroit	MI
The Transit Authority	Huntington	WV
Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority	Toledo	OH
Tompkins Consolidates Area Transit (TCAT)	Ithaca	NY
Transfort/Dial-A-Ride	Fort Collins	CO
Transit Authority of Lexington (LexTran)	Lexington	KY
Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky(TANK)	Fort Wright	KY
Transit Authority of River City (TARC)	Louisville	KY
Triangle Transit Authority	Research Triangle Pk.	NC
Tri-County Commuter Rail Authority (TRI-RAIL)	Pompano Beach	FL
Tri-County Metropolitan Transit District (Tri-Met)	Portland	OR
URTA (Urban Rural Transportation Alliance, Inc.)	Columbia	MD
Visalia City Coach	Visalia	CA
Volusia County Transit Authority (VOTRAN)	South Daytona	FL
Waccamaw Regional Transportation Authority (CRPTA)	Conway	SC
Waco Transit Systems, Inc. (WTS)	Waco	TX
Waukesha Metro Transit	Waukesha	WI
Western Reserve Transit Authority	Youngstown	OH
Windham Region Transit District	Willimantic	CT
Winston-Salem Transit Authority	Winston-Salem	NC
York County Transportation Authority d/b/a Rabbit Transit	York	PA