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The Impact of Authority and Agendas in The Management Of Public Authorities: Studying The Relationship Between Public Transportation Authority Boards And Executives

Robert August Schneider
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Robert August Schneider entitled "The Impact of Authority and Agendas in The Management Of Public Authorities: Studying The Relationship Between Public Transportation Authority Boards And Executives." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Political Science.

<div align="right">Michael R. Fitzgerald, Major Professor</div>

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

William Lyons, Anthony Nownes, Stephen H. Richards

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<div align="right">Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School</div>

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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We have read this dissertation
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THE IMPACT OF AUTHORITY AND AGENDAS
IN THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES: STUDYING THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
AUTHORITY BOARDS AND EXECUTIVES

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Robert August Schneider
December 2006

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my lovely wife and also to my two daughters, one of which delayed its progress and the other that inspired it.

And also to my parents, for their love and support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my family, especially my wife Amy. She has been with me every step of the way and has stood beside me from project start to finish. Her belief in me as a scholar allowed me thrive academically, professionally and personally. It is with her understanding, her appreciation and her dedication this dissertation stands complete. She is as responsible for this product as anyone.

Thanks and acknowledgement is next offered to my parents, Karen and Joe. Their support began when they dropped me off at Western Carolina University in August 1993 and never allowed me to look back. They stood behind me through struggles and distractions and remained supportive at each step, asking the tough questions but never wavering in their love. As for distractions, I thank my unbelievable daughter Allison, for her unabashed and unconditional love. As for love, to my late grandmother June, I owe my individualism, my spirit and my strength.

Without doubt the faculty of The University of Tennessee shaped my intellectual development in the discipline of political science but Dr. Allison Hayes, a graduate of this institution, first exposed me to the science of politics. It is without her that I would be neither political scientist nor Volunteer. Since my arrival at this university, I have come to understand scholarship and inquiry only due to the excellence of the scientists that are now my colleagues. While there are many faculty members who have played a role in my development, special recognition goes to Dr. Michael Fitzgerald, who has diligently directed my dissertation but long before directed my growth as a student and practitioner of public administration. Dr. Fitzgerald defied my expectations of academics, taught me to embrace my values and then forced me to defend them. Equal in

ABSTRACT

Public authorities are a popular form of quasi-governmental institutions and have been extensively chronicled in regards to effective public service delivery. Authorities are exceptionally popular within the public transportation industry but have slowly lost their fiscal power due to the strengthening of parent governments. This dissertation examines the authority structure in public transportation to understand the linkage between this loss of fiscal power and executive management of public authorities by studying the governing board-executive manager relationship. In particular, this dissertation examines the structure and relationship by studying factors impacting relationships and connections between deceased fiscal power and the members recruited to serve on authority boards.

This exploratory study examines five public transportation authorities in the cities of Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga and Jackson, Tennessee in addition to the city of Lexington, Kentucky. Utilizing qualitative interviews this research collected primary source, subjective data on perspectives and opinions of authority executives and board members related to fiscal power, policy preferences, representation and executive support. Findings suggest a distinct connection between fiscal power and the types of board members appointed to serve on public authority boards. In the case of public transportation, higher fiscal power saw higher-level board members with less inclination for executive micromanagement. Lower fiscal authority had the effect of attracting low-level members with service-related agendas falling under executive authority with more opportunity for micromanagement and conflict. Unique was the lack of conflict despite increasing occasion for encroachment on executive authority; this was due to executive

management of board agendas to create positive relationships with strong support. The

study also revealed boards place tremendous value on representation and therefore

translate experiences, expertise and personal agendas to board activities and decisions.

Finally this study argued that James Svara's duality-dichotomy model of local

government (1985; 1989b; 1990) provides understanding of public authorities due to

parallels with the council-manager system. The research indicates that first, the study is

applicable to public authorities and second, board-executive relationships offer a new

contextual dimension along board member orientations toward policy activities, advisory

functions and community representation.

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CHAPTER I

PUBLIC AUTHORITIES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: STRUCTURE, PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE

INTRODUCTION

Public authorities play an important role in public service delivery, as they provide an alternative structure and form of governance in the pursuit of *achieving results*. The collective study of public authorities operating across the U.S. has yielded considerable insight to the form, function and value of authorities yet there is still much we do not know. This dissertation expands our understanding of authorities through an exploratory study of the factors impacting the relationship between public authority board members and executives. Specifically, this research examines board-executive relationships through the lens of public transportation authorities.

Despite their popularity, public authorities are an oft-ignored structure of government, holding many forms and making comparison difficult. Most research focuses on the purpose of the public authority—taking the government structure out of government service—resulting in an emphasis on flexibility, accountability and productivity. While these are salient issues, little existing research focuses on the structural functioning of the authority, in particular internal and external relationships among the members of the authority and how the relationships influence decision-making processes and shape policy decisions.

When considering the critical roles the board and executive play in the public authority structure the interaction and relationship between the board and executive is tantamount to understanding the connection between structure and organizational

performance. Despite considerable attention to public authorities in many other important areas, scholars have not yet focused on the board-executive relationship. This research seeks to explore this relationship and its impact on organizational performance by addressing three closely related questions. First, what are the perceived roles of board members serving on public transportation authorities? Second, under what circumstances are public transportation authority board members more likely to seek involvement in decision-making that falls under executive authority? Third, what impact does this encroachment on executive responsibility have on board membership support for the executive? This research should also offer significant insight into the roles of public authority board members and executives at both the individual and collective level while examining the specific values and goals of public transportation authority board members. Most important, this dissertation provides an understanding of how board members' role perceptions and preferences impact the executive-board relationship and therefore organizational performance.

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PUBLIC AUTHORITY STRUCTURE

Overview of Quasi Governmental Institutions

Scholars of public administration and public policy have long been concerned with the structure of local government (Hansen 1975; Lyons 1978; Morgan and Pelissero 1980; Svara 1985; 1989b; 1990; Deno and Mehay 1987; Schneider and Park 1989; Box 1995; Benton 2002). Urbanization of the American city center and the vast expansion of government service placed local government structure at the forefront as research

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examined the impact of these structures on program efficiency and effectiveness, citizen

satisfaction, and more recently the powers and interaction among executives and elected

officials. As James Svara asks, "Is governmental form—and, by extension, the pattern of

interaction in the governmental process—related to certain outcomes" (1990, 60)? While

a tremendous volume of research is available on the standard forms of council-mayor and

council-manager systems, significant interest lies in quasi-governmental structures such

as government corporations, government sponsored enterprises, special districts and

public authorities, which are also known as hybrid organizations.

Quasi-governments are a unique and important phenomenon in public

administration. They are often employed as an approach to specialized and often difficult

public programs and services, which frequently utilize a mix of public and private sector

organizational models; they are designed to be innovative while juxtaposed with

decreased levels of oversight and accountability. Quasi-governmental institutions are

government structures that "combine characteristics of public- and private sector

organizations" to achieve optimum results in public service delivery "through the best of

both worlds: public accountability and private efficiency" (Koppell 2003, 1). By nature,

hybrid organizations are heterogeneous and outright ambiguous, making definition

exceedingly difficult, yet they share a number of characteristics that distinguish them

from traditional bureaucratic structures. They are publicly or privately owned (fully or

partially), profit-seeking entities that charge user fees to offset operational costs.

Additionally, hybrids are frequently exempt from various federal and state laws and

regulations and are organized with a flexible structure that permits greater achievement of

specific public policy objectives (Perry and Rainey 1988; Koppell 2003) and limited

accountability (Moe 2001).

While these characteristics are generally vague, is easier to understand hybrids by

what they are not rather than what they are. Hybrids are not traditional bureaucratic

agencies, which are typified by: formalized and standardized roles within a rigidly

ordered organizational hierarchy; highly centralized and structured decision-making

authority; and a complex system of specialized job functions spread across a large

number of hierarchical levels (Robbins 1983). Additionally, hybrids are not

governmental departments, which are funded directly by tax revenues and direct

oversight by an executive or legislature like the U.S. Department of Labor. Quasi-

governmental institutions should not be confused with independent agencies, such as the

Environmental Protection Agency, which are fully funded by the federal government

with a director appointed by the president (Meier 1993) or commissions such as the

Security and Exchange Commission that perform regulatory or investigative functions for

the government and are more independent and insulated from executive branch influence

through partisan appointments and lengthy, overlapping terms (Koppell 2003).

Hybrids are popular because they are able to achieve greater organizational

effectiveness, often with a reduced cost. This makes quasi-governments appealing to

politicians—especially in times of budgetary crisis and revenue shortfalls—and

generally palatable to the public because hybrids are modeled after private organizations

and approach government service with business-like processes. Even if they are not more

effective than traditional bureaucracy, hybrids offer the promise of a business atmosphere

while avoiding suspicion of "all things governmental" (Koppel 2003, 3). As traditional

government seeks innovative alternatives to public service delivery, hybrids are readily available and can be tailored to virtually any scope or shape (Moe and Stanton 1989) and hint toward the popular trend of privatization (Koppell 2003, 7).

There are numerous types of quasi-governmental institutions; however emphasis is on four main types. Very common at the federal level are the first two types of hybrids: government corporations, publicly-owned and funded through private revenues (Mitchell 1999); and government sponsored enterprises, which are privately-owned and government sponsored (Siedman 1975; 1988; Moe and Stanton 1989). Traditionally, government corporations have received the lion's share of attention, primarily because of their long history and organizational mission. A key example is the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) (Selznick 1949; Lilenthal 1944; Pritchett 1943), a program affecting almost the entire southeastern U.S. for more than fifty years and among the most extensively chronicled programs in U.S. political history. Recently government sponsored enterprises have gained more attention due to major enterprises such as "Fannie Mae" and "Freddie Mac," mortgage lending programs that are among the largest companies in the United States or the "Sallie Mae" federal student loan corporation that funds billions of dollars of education annually (Koppell 2003).

While the emphasis on quasi-governmental structure is typically at the federal level the vast majority of hybrid organizations exist at the sub-national level (Foster 1997) and incorporate the two additional structures. Special districts, which often operate with an independently elected board, are supported primarily by private funding and augmented by significant public dollars generated from specialized taxing authority (Smith 1969; Mitchell 1999; Foster 1997; Koppell 2003). Finally, public authorities are

fully owned by the public with a board of directors appointed by elected officials and utilize a hybrid structure to bypass regulatory measures and red tape to generate high revenue levels to offset expenses (Mitchell 1992).

The evolution of special districts to public authorities is unique. Until the late 1940s, special districts were sufficient to maintain and deliver public services because the scope of service required limited government involvement. A special tax to meet low-level policy or project needs was effective until the close of World War II when revenue bonds became common stemming from previous special district failures to collect taxes, especially on real estate during the Depression. President Franklin Roosevelt went so far as to encourage the use of authorities, as they allowed for growth and development of public goods and services without complex legal entanglements or heavy imposition on the tax base. Attention was on facilities, not services, and authorities established a new mechanism for building and operating large infrastructure projects. By the mid-1960s a new phase of special purpose governments was in full swing, spawned by swelled authority coffers from user fees collected at tolls roads. What was significant from this new phase was the reinvestment of surplus into additional projects (rather than servicing the existing public debt) and the development of a planning function that entrenched the ad hoc agency and created a permanent organization (Smith 1969).

Smith notes that the two concepts of special districts and public authorities are often used interchangeably since they "are formed to take advantage of special sources of revenue which will not count as an obligation against debt-burdened local governments" (1969, 248). Distinct in Smith's discussion is the understanding that special districts operate within a fixed geographic area, lending itself to a fixed constituency that can be

assessed with special tax levies, especially on real estate. Meanwhile, the public

authority is less reliant on a single constituency for revenues, as it emphasizes revenue

bonds and user fees and is beholden to a wider constituency of bondholders, users,

residents of the impacted area and finally the parent government (1969, 246; 269).

Why Study Public Authorities?

The growing trend among local governments is to create public authorities for the

express purpose of avoiding typical mechanisms of bureaucracy and politics to achieve

limited, yet critical public functions. Yet, most scholarly and journalistic treatments of

authorities tend to ignore the emphasis on hybridized structure and instead focus on

particularly successful or disastrous organizational undertakings. Robert Smith's (1964;

1969) detailed analysis of the formation of the New York City Metropolitan Transit

Authority, Austin Tobin's treatments of the Port Authority of New York New Jersey

(1953) and Robert Caro's study of "Master Builder" Robert Moses' pioneering efforts to

create the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (1974) are excellent case studies of

the politically charged environments and success stories of these unique organizations.

The reverse is the well chronicled and infamous Washington Public Power Supply

System, an $8 billion public works project that involved more than $700 million worth of

projects subject to bid rigging, kickbacks and the "single largest default in the history of

the American municipal bond market" (Henriques 1986, 11). While these are without

doubt fascinating examinations of organizational successes and failures that provide a

wealth of knowledge, understanding and consideration of the formation of public

authorities, these studies yield limited understanding of how structure impacts the

governance and execution of public service delivery.

Public authorities embody the belief that certain components of public service can operate with the efficiency and effectiveness of a private business because they are *structured* to function free of public and political pressure or bureaucratic red tape (Smith 1969; Mitchell 1991). The structure of public authorities is extremely important to political scientists, especially public administrationists, for a number of reasons. First, public authorities are the most popular and growing quasi-governmental form and unlike extensively chronicled government corporations and government sponsored enterprises little attention has been paid to the authority format's growth and relevance. Second, public authorities are publicly created and publicly owned organizations that operate outside the standard forms of government to achieve performance levels unavailable to traditional governmental entities.

Third, unlike most traditional forms of government and quasi-governmental structures, public authorities operate on a very clear and narrowly defined scope of purpose established by the parent government and with little room for variation. Fourth, public authorities are employed almost exclusively at the state and local level involving the largest number of governmental institutions and a high level of structural variation. Finally, while public authorities do vary in structure, this form of quasi-government has a number of unifying characteristics that permit study across a wide swath of policy areas and contribute to critical topics of state and local governance, public management, policy analysis, and organizational theory. Fundamental issues of neutral administration, accountability, and government reform are inherently tied to this form of governance.

From a structural standpoint, the public authority employs a corporate approach delivering to public service. Unlike traditional government structures, the authority is

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designed to bypass mechanisms employed in government practice such as civil service, competitive procurement and regularized public hearings. What is distinct about the public authority structure is the streamlining of procedural and decision-making steps to enhance performance and deliver public goods and services more efficiently and effectively. An executive free to make decisions, restructure organizationally and creatively deploy resources to achieve the policy objectives of a board of directors (all while insulated from political influence) makes this model appealing.

While the emphasis is on policy outcomes and organizational performance, the essential components of the public authority are the governing board, which is the policy-making and oversight component of the authority, and the executive charged with executing policy and guiding the organization. Despite the critically important nature of the executive-board relationship, implicit in the success of the public authority model, no existing research focuses exclusively on this relationship within the public authority and what impact this may have on the executive's ability to manage and lead the organization.

Structure, Accountability and Financing in Public Authorities

The literature on public authorities is quite limited and generally falls into three main categories: 1) defining and describing the structure, purpose and benefits of public authorities; 2) problems and consequences related to accountability and control of public authorities; and 3) financing of public authorities.   As discussed above, public authorities are quasi-governmental institutions differing from general purpose (traditional) governments and exist at local, state, and national levels (Smith 1964; Mitchell 1992). Public authorities are used primarily in housing (45%), environmental protection (18%)

and economic development (14%) while transportation, health, port, and utility authorities rank in single digits by percentage; however, this does not mean these are not policy areas of growth for public authorities. In fact, these are amongst the most fertile areas of growth because they permit small to mid-sized urban areas to make forays into unfamiliar policy areas (Mitchell 1992, Table 1.2).

Defining public authorities is difficult, as they are hybrids of government, private business, and non-profit corporations (Tobin 1953; Smith 1964; 1969; Mitchell 1990; Mitchell 1992; Doig and Mitchell 1992; Leigland 1994; Foster 1997; Koppell 2003). Jerry Mitchell's working definition of a public authority is a "corporate entity chartered by one or more governments (national, state or local), governed by an appointed board, and responsible for various public service functions" (1992, 2). Public commissions or publicly-owned corporations with similar structures are considered public authorities under this definition but special districts or commissions with individually elected boards or governments are not.

Public authorities are a "child of the neutral competence wave" that began during the Progressive Era and peaked shortly before the start of the First World War (Doig and Mitchell 1992, 19). The independent public authority, in its ideal form, is structured to develop revenue-producing public services or facilities insulated from political pressures (Smith 1964; 1969; Horn 1976; Henriques 1986) to ensure the critical separation between administration and implementation. As described in his classic work "The Study of Administration," Woodrow Wilson argued that "Public administration is detailed and systematic execution of public law . . . but the general laws . . . are obviously outside of and above administration. The broad plans of governmental action are not administrative;

the detailed execution of such plans is administrative" (Svara 1998). The public authority structure is extremely helpful in delivering services in this form because the executive is isolated from the normal public pressures common in typical state or municipal services in hopes of "banishing [politics] . . . from administration" (Doig 1983). Authorities also foster high levels of expertise and specialization, "increasingly required for the technological needs of government" in these key, often single-purpose, policy areas (Smith 1969, 141; Mitchell 1991). They are extremely popular not only because of their ability to specialize in a single policy area but also due to their flexibility and variation among numerous policy networks.

Authorities are also designed to provide solutions in areas with large-scale problems, in politically decentralized areas or when difficulty arises regarding coordination of services across multiple jurisdictions on either a permanent or temporary basis (Smith 1964; 1969; Doig and Mitchell 1992; Hamilton 1999). Public authority power is typically single-purpose and narrow in scope, such that decisions do not negatively impact general-purpose government functions and are seen as a relief, not a threat (Smith 1969, 185).

What distinguishes the public authority from standard government is its operational structure. Authority leadership is comprised of an independent governing board and a staff selected, promoted, and retained based on neutral competence—this encourages decision-making independent from elected officials terms while encouraging long-range thinking (Kaufman 1956; 1969; Smith 1964; 1969). Public authorities are usually comprised of a board of governors with three or more members appointed by elected executives or legislators. The governing board is charged with five main

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functions: 1) making policy; 2) supervising administrative activities; 3) oversight of bond issuance; 4) safeguarding the public; and 5) keeping the public informed and involved through hearings (Mitchell 1990). Although appointed, boards do not necessarily work for elected officials. Rather, the board is designed to function outside of political pressure while making decisions that will advance the goals and objectives of the authority operation. To protect against pressure from elected officials, most boards incorporate staggered, fixed-length terms and include provisions to ensure members cannot be removed from office until their term expires (except in obvious cases of public malfeasance) (Smith 1969).

The majority of public authority board members serve without financial compensation, yet there is often considerable competition for these seats. Board memberships are positions of power deeply involved in significant policy decision-making (Mitchell, 1990) but "without the necessity of a political campaign" and with limited technical oversight (Smith 1969, 328). Many seek board appointments because of their particular interest in a policy issue and authority boards are highly attractive because membership does not require a full-time commitment.

The second key component of the authority structure is the executive director, appointed by the authority board or parent government, responsible for carrying out policy decisions and directing service (Smith 1964; Henriques 1986; Mitchell 1990). The executive is envisioned as ideologically neutral and is expected to undertake assignments without partisan or community concern. Executives can usually expect elected officials to enhance managerial power by exercising political influence in support of policies developed and recommended by management (Horn 1976; Leigland and Lamb 1986).

The executive in the ideal public authority relies on staffing based on performance—not party affiliation or political contacts (Kaufman 1956; Waldo 1984). Neutral competence and performance are considered to be "crucial in legitimating an authority's insulation from elected officials" and is linked to entrepreneurial orientation—developing new strategies along with improving old programs (Doig and Mitchell, 1992, 21). Along with an insulated staff, the agency's management structure, personnel system, budget process, and accounting system should be under the agency's control, not tied to rigid systems that constrain traditional government. This system of self-management translates into significant discretion in deciding changes and priorities. The "ideal" agency is the authority that maintains control over new initiatives with approval by the legislatures and elected officials being readily obtained. As one public manager states (Boschken 1989, 158):

> When you have a commission that concerns itself with broad policy matters . . . and doesn't get into minute details of the administration and an imaginative staff left free to create and improve, there flows through the whole organization, . . . a feeling of mutual understanding and respect. . . . Things get done.

The public authority structure has been identified as a highly successful mechanism granted powers to achieve services and meet specific policy goals that typical government structure is unable to achieve (Doig 1983; Braun 1992; Muniak 1992). Authorities can bypass red tape and avoid fiscal and staffing limitations of traditional government (self or legally imposed) to achieve new large-scale programs and projects (Eimecke 1992; Heiman 1992). It also permits collective or regional approaches to problems that a single entity could not handle alone (Finn 1992). Smith (1969, 278) described the benefit of authorities:

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As a guest, who would run in, build a bridge, pay for it and depart, leaving behind the modern structure, the public authority has been a welcome patron. Its brashness in flouting red tape and getting things done on a large scale could provide for the host government a vicarious sense of power and achievement. It was fun to live during the bond maturity, with an agency that dared to innovate with different merit systems, salary scales, single contracts, attractive advertising, and pricing polices. It afforded a chance to think big, if only through association.

The benefits of the public authority go beyond the mere avoidance of bureaucratic red tape. As Smith mentions, governments constrained by limited fiscal strength or administrative staff to take on a vast project is able to offer new programs and services that citizens desperately need. Moreover, it allows governments in a region to tackle problems collectively with crosscutting jurisdiction and power to solve problems that a single local or state entity could not handle alone.

The second main area of public authority literature is on accountability and control, a salient issue due to the paradoxical nature of limited authority control and their susceptibility to mismanagement (Henriques 1986; Doig 1983). The first paradox is authorities are decentralized from parent governments with great latitude and little oversight but are internally centralized with little direct influence from the governing board or outside organizations or forces. This opportunity for mismanagement can be exacerbated by incompetence among the board, executive and staff, while the limited oversight and increased discretion can lead to political bias or the more dangerous problem of outright corruption (Walsh 1978).

This leads to the second paradox: the lack of oversight among public authorities (one of the self-described benefits of the authority model) is a perennial problem.

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Oversight is the very thing authorities seek to avoid, yet it remains the best way to stop problems related to mismanagement, incompetence, and corruption (Henriques 1986). The key issue of accountability remains "how to build an accountability framework that brings together political responsiveness and functional expertise" (Mitchell 1990, 9). There is considerable debate over where oversight power should rest (elected officials or public) and what mechanisms of regulation should be used. A more important issue is what impact oversight has on the effectiveness of authorities. Innovation is at the heart of the public authority model and the growing level of restriction and regulation threatens their success.

The third paradox is the very things authorities are designed to avoid—bureaucratic red tape and constraints—are imposed by outside forces as a mechanism to control the very functions the authority was formed to do. These constraints yield a high number of costs to the system and reduce efficiency and effectiveness while disrupting the structure (Doig and Mitchell 1992; Leigland 1992). Despite these costs there is considerable value in such bureaucratic red tape, as red tape is an instrument established to ensure proper procedure, due process, fairness, equity, and equality before the law—fundamental values in the execution of programs and policy among democratic regimes (Kaufman 1977).

The parent government holds a tremendous amount of control as it establishes the authority's characteristics and powers: functions, structure, time frame, and financial authority (Doig and Mitchell 1992). Post-formation control has been predominantly focused on the financial aspect of authorities. Auditing and accounting requirements, authorization for budgets and direct representation through ex officio or statutory

positions have been highly effective in controlling authorities. Appointment power also

plays a significant role as board members likely to represent the parent government's

viewpoint are recruited and installed. One of the most direct, effective and popular

reforms has been for state and local governments to expand their own powers to absorb

the controversial functions and perform them for the authority. This allows the authority

to succeed in its primary mission but incorporates oversight in essential areas (Leigland

1992).

The third and arguably most important aspect of the public authority structure

relates to the financial elements of essence to quasi-governments. The force behind the

public authority model is policy-making, intentionally insulated from outside influence,

to achieve public goals unachievable by standard forms of government. All government

activity requires a process of raising and expending public resources and the power to

control this process and establish the scope of service delivery while providing insight

into the winners and losers in the struggle for political power (Smithies 1975). The

budget is at the center of service delivery: setting and controlling the "translation of

financial resources into human purposes . . . and a mechanism for making choices among

alternative expenditures" (Wildavsky 1979, 2)—it is the essence of public purpose and

political power.

Initial public authority powers included issuing bonds, setting tax rates and

establishing user fees (Council of State Governments 1953) with early emphasis on the

power of issuing bonds. In 1969, Robert Smith writes, "Basic to any definition of a

public authority is its reliance on the revenue-bond method of finance" (3) but notes that

authorities such the New York City Transit Authority operate without a capital budget

but is instead included in the city's capital budget (77). Expansion of general purpose government powers and controls on authorities limits this power, forcing authorities to finance programs and projects through a more creative mix of bonds, federal grants, dedicated tax revenues and direct subsidies (Mitchell 1992). From a financial perspective, this creates a myriad of issues. Authorities are now project-specific with limited ability to raise direct revenue (Smith 1969; Mitchell and Miller 1992) and bond market difficulties (Leigland and Lamb 1986; McKinney 1986; Leigland 1993) force authorities to greatly rely on grants, local subsidies and unreliable dedicated funding sources (often varied and inconsistent) (Smith 1992).

The impact on authority decision-making power is significant, as the parent government absorbs powers of budgetary functions and imposes control (Henriques 1986). Mere changes in accounting and reporting practices are essentially oversight; however, when authorities must rely on the parent government for direct subsidy, budget approval, procurement processes and approval of almost all financial decisions, the board and the executive are essentially stripped of the broad policy-making power necessary to execute organizational mission. Instead of guiding the broad mission of the authority and directing the organization toward new policy areas, the board and executive become caretakers.

BOARDS IN GOVERNMENTAL, NON-PROFIT AND FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Boards are used in a wide variety of organizations and come in numerous forms and functions. The term 'board' is frequently thrown around without a clear

understanding of the actual power or role of a board. First, when understanding boards, it is essential to understand where a board may fit, both in terms of authority and organizational placement. Governing boards are exceeded in power only by the owners or the enabling organization (or parent government as the case may be) and have key roles of both authority and accountability. Next, advisory boards do not have this type of delineated power but rather provide advice and counsel for the executive; however, this advisory capacity can carry substantial weight depending on the organization. Other types, such as line boards that act in very narrow and limited capacity, or workgroup boards, which have no staff and are actively involved in researching decisions and organizing proposals for consideration, comprise other organizational roles (Carver 1997). This research and subsequent discussion is focused on the governing aspect of boards.

Another key aspect of understanding boards is by organizational nature— governmental, non-profit, and for-profit. These three types of boards have a number of distinct differences. Their place in the organizational structure and the power they wield results in great variation, as does the level of public scrutiny (based upon governmental, non-profit, and for-profit status). There are also many different specified operational procedures required (or at least permitted) under law, agreement or corporate charter that impact their operation. Methods of operation are driven by distinctly different traditions in both government and private sector boards and often impact control and influence from within the board, from the executive or even outside players and "the people" at large (Carver 1997).

Despite these differences, Peter Drucker wryly argues that all board have one thing in common—they do not function (1974, 628). His argument is that few boards perform as intended or able to because there is little control of, or training for, members (Juran and Louden 1966; Waldo 1985; Witt 1987). Reasons for this are identified by Carver as a focus on trivial minutiae as opposed to large-scale matters facing the organization. Short-term bias also plays a role when board members abdicate their long-range organizational and policy vision in exchange for near-term issues or "even more dysfunctional[ly], with the past" (Carver 1997, 9). Finally, boards tends to take reactive positions based on staff recommendations, fail to be proactive in setting their own agendas, tend to focusing on what has already been done, poorly develop proactive interaction with the executive and generally have unclear lines of authority.

Attempts to improve on these problems generally fall flat as the recommended remedies to these maladies are cosmetic and simply fail to address the fundamental issues causing board ineffectiveness. The most common reaction to is to adjust the level of involvement: a more involved board helps get things done because they are less detached and are able to help direct the talents of the organization; yet a less involved board acts as a better governor and is more businesslike. Another issue is the improvement of board-staff relations by acting as a watchdog to ensure high levels of accountability for the public good. The other recommendation is to act more as a cheerleader or champion of the organization, helping develop trust relationships and rubberstamping executive recommendations. There are even conflicting recommendations regarding what type of board involvement is best suited for governance: a managing board, which emphasizes interaction and decision-making on personnel, financial management and program

leadership; a planning board that develops long-range agendas and creates a framework for organizational success; or a communicator board with an emphasis on increasing the humanistic relationship among the board and staff. These recommendations are not particularly helpful because they have limited applicability and seem to offer a proverbial "pick your poison." How the board functions, the relationship with the executive, and the perceived problems on which focus is directed are the more significant issues that impact boards and their effectiveness (Carver 1997).

Research related to governing boards in political science is very limited, with most research and analysis conducted in social work and non-profit management. Literature on effective board composition is generally inconclusive and primarily descriptive, as in the case of representative composition of board members (Austin and Woolever 1992; Gibelman, Gelman and Pollack 1997; Saidel and Harlan 1998; Abzug and Galaskiewicz 2001), effective board size and its impacts (Miller and Weiss 1988), board roles and responsibilities (Louden and Zusman 1975; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Fama and Jensen 1983; Fligstein and Freeland 1995) and general board effectiveness (Allison 2002; Brooks 2002; Miller-Millesen 2003; Nobbie and Brudney 2003; Brown and Iverson 2004).

Despite scores of articles on governing boards in the volunteer non-profit sector, the emphasis remains almost exclusively on the board, its composition and effectiveness with a considerably large gap in research on the executive-board relationship. One of the most popular and relevant models on governing boards stems from John Carver's (1997) fourteen prescriptive principles "to organize the thought, activities, structure, and relationships of governing boards," (17) that form the basis of his policy governance

model. This model, developed for non-profit boards, seeks to provide guidance for the board as policy is developed in four areas. The first is ends policies that surround the intended impact on the external environment and purpose of the organization. This is primarily mission-oriented policy and is generally comprised of three main components: the impact of policy on those served by the organization; the characteristics of those receiving results; and the cost achieving results for that population or its sub-set. Ends policies identify what results are to be achieved, for what group, and at what cost (Carver and Carver 1997; Nobbie and Brudney 2003).

Carver's second policy type is means policies that focus chiefly on controlling and directing resources, communicating objectives and maintaining active accountability. The third and fourth policy types, board-staff relationships and governance processes, are also means-oriented but are distinctly different. The board-staff policies establish the level of authority delegated to the executive and staff as well as expectations and accountability. Governance process policies incorporate how the board will organize itself, what its own expectations are and most important, a clear understanding of "in whose behalf the board acts" (Carver 1997, 33). While this model does not speak specifically to the executive-board relationship, it does provide a more in-depth understanding of the issues surrounding board effectiveness and the factors that may impact the relationship under review.

The academic literature from the private for-profit sector follows the same general tack as non-profit with a large volume of research oriented toward board composition and selection (Baysinger and Butler 1985; Kosnik 1990; Barnhart, Marr and Rosenstein 1994; Klien 1998; Luoma and Goodstein 1999) with concentration on the business acumen of

members (Hermalin and Weisbach 1988; Baysinger, Kosnik and Turk 1991). Analysis of board member success is primarily measured in terms of profit and loss while balancing the needs of long-term planning and directing short-term market sensitive decisions (Louden and Zusman 1975; Singh and Harianto 1989; Gulati and Westphal 1999; Shivdasani and Yermack 1999; Harper 2005). Recognizing that board emphasis should be on long-term planning with short-term execution, business research and practical evaluations have been focused on the proper role of the board, member responsibilities, organizational vision and results-oriented decision-making (Kosnik 1987; Demb and Neubrauer 1992; Ford 1992). A considerable body of practical, axiomatic work on developing board effectiveness exists; however, most are produced by former CEOs, board members and consultants and draw on few limited academic studies or scholarly research.

There is considerable debate regarding independent vs. collaborative boards and the impact of executive-member relationships on organizational efficacy. The independent board model suggests little executive-board interaction is most effective with members serving on behalf of shareholders as independent watchdogs to monitor decision-making and evaluate performance (Kosnik 1987; 1990; Walsh and Seward 1990; Westphal and Zajac 1995). The collaborative model takes the approach that higher levels of executive interaction with the board creates an environment where boards provide more advice and counsel with increased opportunity for oversight (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Baysinger and Butler 1985; Westphal 1999).

DICHOTOMY AND DUALITY AS A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING

The lack of existing scholarly research on the relationship between public authority boards and executives exemplifies the relevance of this study, yet is problematic in terms of the limited applicability of existing quasi-government research, more specifically research pertaining to public authorities. On surveying literature related to local government structures and organizations, the primary tool for understanding executive-board relationships comes from James Svara's dichotomy-duality model of local governance (Svara 1985; 1989a; 1990). Svara's subsequent work, or the litany of research it spawned, made no attempt to study the public authority structure but his review of the governmental process is applicable to virtually any organization (Svara 1990, 17).

Although we long ago dismissed the notion of the supposed politics-administration dichotomy, it remains integral to understanding the relationship between those charged with developing policy and those responsible for implementing policy. The idea of a dichotomy allows us to distinguish between policy-making and implementation phases of governmental processes while openly acknowledging that the phases, players, and functions of policy development and implementation overlap at virtually all points and times (Svara, 1999b; 2001). The dichotomy, as originally mentioned by Wilson (1889) was simply asking us to use neutral competence in the pursuit of public programs; however, some scholars misinterpreted the dichotomy (Sayre, 1951; Svara, 1998) as a dividing line between what functions belong to elected officials and administrators.

Expanding Svara's work becomes extremely valuable in understanding the public authority structure, as the essence of the dichotomy-duality model is its ability to draw lines that represent power and responsibility across the basic functions of government. Using the classic policy-administration models (Goodnow 1900; Dahl 1947; Simon 1957; Sayre 1958; Schick 1976; Frederickson 1971; 1980), Svara divides the policy component into mission and policy while the administration element is reconfigured as administration and management. Briefly described, mission is the guiding force of the organization supplied by elected officials while policy is the mid-range policy decisions, typically decided by the council with advice of staff. More elaborately, elected officials (council members) are the primary mission builders with administrators (city managers and staff) offering advice and education to the council on general trends. In the area of policy, the elected officials and administrative staff have an almost equal share of influence in the formulation of policy, with technical knowledge and staff expertise playing a significant role in policy proposals (Svara 1985). This may invoke the image of a "rubber stamp" council, but in reality the council members establish policy guidelines which serve as a framework for staff development of these proposals (Svara 1990).

The administrator and staff role grows even larger in the area of administration consisting of decisions and low-level polices used in the implementation of programs and services. Some oversight by elected officials does occur through airing citizen complaints or taking an active interest in the decision-making. Management is almost exclusively the sole territory of administrators and includes human, material, and informational resources (Svara 1985; 1989a; 1990). Mission, policy, administration, and management are the four elements that exist regardless of the size, scope, or structure of

government—it is just a matter of whether these functions are shared among players and to what extent.

Most significant in Svara's model is duality, the recognition that some form of dichotomy does exist based on the above principles but that all functions of government are shared by elected officials and administrators, only with varying levels of involvement. In his research, Svara shows council has primary responsibility for establishing organizational mission and policy but it occurs with an executive "[providing] facts and technical assessment of consequences only" and on request (Svara 1989b, 31). Simultaneously, the administration is charged with executing the will of elected officials but with full knowledge the council has a right and responsibility to oversee the program outputs and hold the administration accountable for outcomes (Svara 1985; 1990).

Initially the dichotomy-duality model was used to explore council-manager relationships but has since been upheld, expanded, and applied to executives in strong and weak mayor systems as well as in large and mid-sized areas (Svara 1999a). This broad framework of mission, policy, administration, and management helps us see the four dimensions of governmental processes as one dimension blending "into the other for form a continuum from 'pure' policy to 'pure' management" (Svara 1989a). More importantly, this continuum allows us to see the governmental "black box" in clear light (Svara 1990, 5). As Svara has shown, the dichotomy is not a proverbial line in the sand but rather the zone in which the roles and functions of elected officials and public administrators begin to overlap (Svara 1985; 1999b; 2001).

The public authority is modeled on business principles and is expected to act and perform differently than traditional government structures. If the dichotomy-duality model is simply a tool for conceptualizing the relationship between legislators and executives then it should have applicability to public authority structures as well. The question is can the existing research on council-manager relationships be expanded to the public authority? The problems are numerous. First, the four dimensions described by Svara are generally disconnected in government, unlike the private sector where process and flow is comparatively seamless (Svara 1990, 17). Second, business strategy requires flexibility, restructuring and rapid goal-mission shifts as demands change; government, where citizen-as-stakeholder is paramount, cannot do this. Third, government involves greater electoral control over mission than in private enterprise. Boards, councils, and citizens have greater opportunity for influence in all four dimensions in government as opposed to the private sector where the board is selected by ownership and has a limited scope of organizational leadership (Svara 1990, 17).

Fourth, authorities operate to provide more flexible, unencumbered, and innovative services to citizens. As a result, authority boards often establish policy that allows considerable discretion for the executive, providing an unusually free hand. Fifth, board members are rarely elected to their seat on the authority but appointed by elected officials or serve ex officio as part of their elected duties, not because of their knowledge in the public authority's policy area (Mitchell, 1990). Finally, authority executives often have two masters, the parent government as well as the board. In many cases, the authority executive reports to the board but is contractually and ultimately responsible to the chief executive of the parent government.

There are, however, stronger parallels. Most important, there are consistent
structural elements with public authorities relying on a "board-executive" relationship
while council-manager systems employ a similar system with a city manager (executive)
reporting to the council (board). The executive bears responsibility for carrying out the
broad policy decisions of the public authority board and directing the delivery of services
(Horn 1976). Another parallel is that authority executives are often hired by, or is at least
responsible to, their board and serve at the pleasure of the board or parent government
(depending on charter) just as city managers serve for councils. This requires patterns of
oversight and regularized approval of actions by the board, as would occur in the council-
manager format but at varying degrees. There is a politically neutral executive charged
with administrative and management functions who must simultaneously implement
policy without deference to partisanship or public involvement while providing expert
policy advice to a board that has staggered, overlapping terms and a strong mission-
policy responsibility and administrative oversight (Smith 1969; Horn 1976; Doig 1983;
Mitchell 1992). A less obvious parallel is supported by Svara's strong-manager variation
of the dichotomy-duality model where managers are significant forces in policy
formation, mirroring the freedoms given to authority executives. City managers lack the
freedoms allowed an authority executive; however, in this variation the city manager is
also the chief policy maker.

The emphasis of the dichotomy-duality model is on relationships and a
framework of understanding. The differences between traditional and public authority
structures are focused on who holds power and the expectations of the relationship.
These problems and parallels also exist in comparing council-manager and council-mayor

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(strong or weak) structures but the value of the model has been borne out with strong theoretical and empirical results. Most important, this dissertation is focused on a better understanding of this relationship by utilizing an existing conceptualization of the functions of government and an existing analytical framework to consider how public authority boards and executives interact in the particular case of public transportation.

THE RISE OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
ORGANIZATIONS AND GOVERNANCE

A Historical Perspective

In the case of mass public transportation, the public authority model is the most common form of government structure. Of the 589 U.S. public transit agencies identified by Federal Transit Administration's National Transit Database (NTD) in 2003, 191 (32%) are listed as "independent agencies with an appointed board of directors." Another 277 transit systems (47%) are listed as units of either municipal or county governments, many of which operate under the public authority structure with the local government serving as authorizing and parent entity (NTD 2004). In Tennessee alone, all four large urban transit systems in the cities of Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga operate under some form of the public authority structure.

Public authorities in the public transportation industry have been extremely common since the 1950s. At that time, most major cities had electric trolley systems in dense urban areas requiring tremendous infrastructure for effective operation. Trolleys were typically owned by private companies that also held electrical utilities, allowing the firms to operate the electric trolleys at minimal cost. Despite decades of public

transportation provided by electric trolley systems, the post-World War II growth of suburban development in conjunction with increased accessibility to personal automobiles became a significant challenge to traditional modes of public transportation. The population shift from downtown to the city's edge made it exceptionally difficult in both cost and speed of construction for transit companies to keep up with the booming suburbs.

By the time public transportation caught up with the movement away from the urban center the public was no longer reliant on mass transit and ridership plummeted. Many of the companies reverted to operating only profitable routes or opted to completely eliminate the dying public transportation market from their holdings. Cities, frustrated with the private companies' limited service areas or threats to drop transportation altogether, were forced to either buy the existing equipment and infrastructure from these companies or create their own systems outright (Barnum 1971).

For most cities, public authorities presented the option of maintaining public transportation without significant expansion of the scope of size of existing bureaucracy. By simply establishing an authority, purchasing the equipment, and retaining the managers and operators of the transportation system, the transition from private to public mass transit was relatively painless. Cities unprepared to create new management staffs, incorporate transit unions and undertake the massive infrastructure needed to maintain effective service used the public authority model as a means to simultaneously govern and manage this newly acquired enterprise.

Memphis, Labor Unions and the Authority Formula

The classic example of this transition is Memphis, TN, where the Memphis Street Railway Company (MSRC) had long-term financial problems and could not sustain profitability, much less basic elements of service delivery necessary for a metropolitan area. City leadership, recognizing that the MSRC was well managed but lacking in financial support, decided to purchase the equipment from the company in the belief that public ownership could provide better service at a profit due to significant federal and state tax advantages—as a private organization, the MSRC's railway's revenues were subject to 52% federal tax alone (Oestreich and Whaley 2001).

The former MSRC management team formed a private company and negotiated a contract with the city to operate the transit system with public funds. The management team kept the old employees most of whom were unionized under the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), which was very supportive of this new private company's creation. ATU support was not driven by benevolence alone; had the city bought the assets and absorbed the operations into traditional city government, the local ATU would have been dealt a death blow. In 1958 the Tennessee Supreme Court ruled that cities, counties and other public agencies that participated in collective bargaining would violate Tennessee's right to work laws (Oestreich and Whaley 2001). Had Memphis made transit a city department the local union's collective bargaining power would have been voided, setting a potentially dangerous national precedent (in the union's eyes), as many cities faced the same crisis as Memphis.

Memphis's City Transportation Commission was reorganized into the Memphis Transit Authority (MTA) and designated as the organization responsible for managing

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the contract with the private management firm along with financial control of the authority and the right to formulate policy. This new structure established several distinct precedents in a city's ability to absorb transit functions. The contracting of services to a private company dealt efficiently, effectively and "ingeniously" with the need for quick and virtually seamless transition from private to public ownership while protecting the labor rights of the operators (term for transit drivers), especially in right to work states where collective bargaining with public employees was prohibited (Oestreich and Whaley 2001). Most important, the service operation was kept out of the hands of local politics through the creation of the transit authority. An authority with financial and policy power ensured city interests were expressed and followed through accountability and oversight of the authority's executive leadership; however, day-to-day operations were divorced from the authority's powers as was formal involvement with the union. The labor contract, work rules and operational policies were the full domain of the private management company in which the board simply had no formal authority.

This new "Memphis Formula" was not as cut-and-dry as it first seemed. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) questioned whether these arrangements were in fact private companies, as they were fully supported by public funds and governed by an authority board with membership and powers established by public law. The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) excludes public organizations from its scope making this decision crucial in upholding the authority-private firm structure as well as union protections. Eventually the NLRB determined the scope of power and authority of the private management firms were significant enough for them to qualify as private companies—so long as the authority kept its distance from labor relations and system

management (Oestreich and Whaley 2001). A process and structure for creating public authorities in public transportation was born.

Power and Scope of Public Transportation Authorities

Early transportation authorities were empowered to oversee all aspects of transportation including operating and capital budgets, taxation and fares, facilities and equipment, routes and executive management. In most cases authority power was not exclusive to mass transportation systems; authorities often had regulatory power over most aspects of transportation including private rail, taxi, school bus and horse-drawn carriages although emphasis was, and has been, almost exclusively on public transportation. At the time of this transition from private to public transportation streetcars remained the most popular method of public transportation, as rubber-tired buses were just coming into widespread use. Therefore most authorities, especially those created in the 1950s and 1960s were granted a variety of powers over system management including route development and approval, fare structure, and financial control. The authority to incur public debt through bonds augmented this zenith of power for public transportation authorities. The high cost of trolley infrastructure along with the ability to coordinate and regulate across a wide swath of transportation services required the issuance of bonds to fund system expansion.

By the late 1960s, most transit systems had abandoned trolleys in favor of buses for their decreased cost and higher flexibility—especially when following the population into their suburban neighborhoods. However, unlike rail lines, buses could not be funded through long-term bonds and the decline in ridership and revenues made short-term bonds exceptionally difficult to market (Smith 1969; Anas 1982; Mitchell and Miller

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1992). As a result transportation authorities became heavily reliant on federal, state, and especially local funding for capital expenditures.   Before long, the cost of operating these systems exceeded revenues requiring subsidization of operating costs (Anas 1982).

The Memphis formula was permitted due to the state's enabling legislation. Existing legislation permitted the creation of the Memphis Transit Authority and the new Memphis Transit Management Company's numerous contractual provisions created "maximum independence [from the MTA]" by circumventing several controlling statutory provisions. The ability to create contracts that could bypass state law and provide the requisite protection for labor unions was an extremely important factor in the nationwide push toward the transition from private to public ownership of public transportation. As states began to pass the enabling legation to follow Memphis's example Congress was shifting attention to public transportation in order to help the state and local governmental takeover of the crumbling private mass transit enterprise. Congress was supportive of the need to take over transit operations but was extremely leery of passing legislation to fund a process that had the ability to destroy collective bargaining rights in right to work states, especially in an era where union power and influence was at its peak. When crafting the Urban Mass Transportation Act (UMTA) of 1964, Congress correctly predicted the popularity of the Memphis formula and in response developed a labor protection, now well known as Section 13(c) (Woodman et al. 1995; Oestreich and Whaley 2001). Section 13(c) established that employees of private transit companies taken over with federal funds retained the same collective bargaining rights as before they were taken over by public transportation authorities (Bodah 1990). These 13(c) agreements are separate from the labor contract and require approval from

the U.S. Secretary of Labor before the U.S. Secretary of Transportation is authorized to release federal funds to the authority.

With Section 13(c) providing the necessary protections, Congress was able to establish funding for state and local governments to acquire private transit company assets while protecting collective bargaining rights. UMTA established the Urban Mass Transit Administration within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (eventually moved to the newly created Department of Transportation in 1966) and was later supplemented by expanding the scope of federal grant funds to include training, research, and planning (APTA 2003a). This funding policy remained relatively constant until the Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act (ISTEA) of 1991, which drastically reduced grant moneys by applying formulas to certain metropolitan statistical populations and reducing the operational assistance provided to mid- and large-sized cities. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), passed in 1997 (APTA 2003a), marked a philosophical shift in funding operational costs, as the Federal Transit Administration eliminated all operational funding for transit systems in metropolitan statistical areas greater than 200,000. With federal dollars allocated for planning and capital expenditures only, state and local governments were forced to significantly increase subsidization for transit operations (APTA 2003b).

This increased subsidization by state and especially local governments (Anas 1982) created a greater need for cities to have increased fiscal control (Groves 1975; Dunbar 1971). In addition to being parent governments, they were the primary financiers of operations requiring an increased role in financial decision-making and resource allocation. Over time cities slowly absorbed the financial functions of transportation

authorities. With the parent governments having final control over budgets and grant match funds (Leigland 1993) while instituting more stringent procurement procedures most public transportation authorities had been stripped of its major fiscal authority leaving them with authority over routes, fare structures, and low-level policy issues. This loss of financial control has significantly reduced transportation authorities' power and influence.

The Modern Role of Public Transportation Authorities and the Impact on Organizational Performance

Over time, the arms-length approach to mass transit provision has changed dramatically. Fifty years ago, local governments were relatively small and unable to create the high-level policy and structure required to operate complex services (Harrigan and Vogel 2000) such as public transportation. Since then, the size and scope of city government has increased dramatically, especially in the area of budgeting and finance, as local-level public debt is more common and professional city administrators are demanding a higher level of control over revenues and expenditures. Yet with this trend toward greater fiscal control by the parent government, the public authority structure remains the most popular form of mass transit governance nationwide. The essence of the public authority is a structure focused on fostering business-like operation of public services with reductions in political and bureaucratic interventions (Mitchell and Doig 1992). Of the many types of public services delivered, mass transit is one of the few operating like a business. Unlike programs that seek to restrict client use and have high costs per additional client served, transit sees the public as customers with purchasing power who may choose to utilize the service and seeks to increase its ridership base

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through service expansion and marketing. In most cases, significant increases in ridership result in no real increases in delivery cost (fixed cost per service hour) as revenue generated from additional riders reduces government subsidy (APTA 2003c).

With a focus on increasing ridership, transit must act like a business in terms of developing business partnerships, while planning and adjusting services to meet customer needs. Freedom to develop public-private partnerships, oversee and direct service planning, devise and implement marketing strategies, reorganize departments and staffing while managing collective bargaining units are significantly inhibited within typical government structures (Smith 1969). The most important element in the public authority model is ability to undertake new and creative strategies to promote or maintain self-sufficiency, independent decision-making, and an entrepreneurial spirit of creativity and innovation often lacking in typical government structure. It is in the environment of the public authority in which the transit authorities are able to thrive.

Public transportation systems are operating in an environment that is seemingly counter-intuitive. Despite the obvious need for public transportation to maintain its hybrid status to develop new transit markets and expand services (especially mass transit organizations in dense urban areas) public transportation authorities are trapped within a structure that is slowly removing policy power from the authority board. As fiscal power is pulled from the grasp of public transportation authorities and centralized within parent governments the potential arises to weaken the strong working relationship required of the executive and his or her board. As financial power is taken from the authority and placed outside of the organization, an environment of increased conflict may emerge based upon the following expectations:

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1. The shift of fiscal power from the public authority to the parent government yields a significant loss of the authority's political power, reducing the willingness of influential and politically astute individuals to serve on the authority board.

2. In the absence of high-level political actors, lower-level community activists and players with service-related agendas fill public transportation board positions. The lower-level agendas of board members will be focused heavily on service-related issues that fall primarily under the scope and authority of the transit executive.

3. This will lead to greater conflict between the executive and board members as agendas conflict or as the executive resists involvement by the board in those areas. The result is decreased support for the executive by individual board members.

Authorities are often created to manage specialized, high-profile projects that receive considerable media attention and have meaningful impact on the community. If the above expectations of reduced policy power caused by a reduction of fiscal power is accurate then there are significant consequences for transportation authorities. First, the public authority board is comprised of members with limited political prowess and efficacy. This makes it extremely difficult for individual board members to develop and maintain the external political capital necessary to effectively guide the transit system. Second, the executive is drawn from the usual territory of administering policy and managing resources into a more prominent role of mission builder and policy maker.

Third, when the executive must gather and wield support for transit-related issues, the board's lack of political capital makes it a relatively weak tool.

Immediately tied to the problem of a board comprised of officials with lower-level policy focus is the tendency for these issues to fall under the scope of the executive. Ideally, boards should view these service-related subjects as minutia to be dealt with by the executive. In reality, a low-level, policy-focused board becomes overly concerned with street-level service issues, which already is the members' focus, is generally easier to comprehend and requires little effort on part of the board member. This has a direct impact on the operation and functions of the transportation authority board. The powers and duties of board, outlined through city or county ordinances, are generally limited to setting bus fares, approving route changes, and conducting public hearings related to changes proposed by the transit system administration.

While there are more broad-based responsibilities related to grant applications, the annual program of projects, and development of short- and long-range transportation goals (Anas 1982), the board tends to focus on the low-level policies of transit operation. Rather than spearhead policy initiates to promote dedicated funding, establish minimum levels of operational efficacy for services or implement more transportation planning, board members focus attention almost exclusively on system operation. Individual board member agendas related to key service areas or populations tend to devolve into public meetings about equipment maintenance, personnel issues, and passenger complaints. The board members begin to see themselves as advocates of transit users instead of advocates and governors of the transit system and transportation in general.

Attention is often placed on issues that are under the established control of the executive charged with managing and administering the mass transit organization. Issues such as personnel management, vehicle utilization, and internal procedures are clearly the responsibility of the system executive and management team; however, under this scenario, the board seeks and expects to be involved in issues that are outside the scope of their legal and structural authority. While these issues are undoubtedly important to overall organizational effectiveness, the more critical component is the impact on the relationship between the executive and board—the transit agency is likely to be governed by a board with limited support for the executive. From an agenda standpoint, the main issues for a low-level, policy-oriented board member tend to be street-level and service specific that are in contrast to the executive's preferences or at best have a lower priority on the executive's agenda.

Micromanagement of the transit system can result in an increasingly strained relationship between the board and the transit executive. Considering the board is likely comprised of some members with individual agendas related to public transportation, members would have issues related to certain aspects of service, which are frequently raised at board meetings. Moreover, board members who feel they represent transit riders act as if they have constituents, despite the authority's structure of reduced political influence. These individual issues and preferences will likely conflict with the executive's authority and organizational direction to create an atmosphere of friction and potential hostility. If the executive places emphasis on an area that is not important to the individual board member, then conflict may ensue, placing a significant strain on the

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executive's most critical relationship. Multiple board members with varying preferences

can make it more difficult to build and maintain support for the organization.

The result is resentment by the executive, the board, or both. The executive is

frustrated by board member incursions on executive territory and an executive dismissive

of board involvement frustrates the individual board member.   Finally, these executive-

board member problems can evolve into conflict among individual board members, as

factions form and infighting creates inaction or counter-productivity. These potential and

likely problems may produce an executive with weakened support from the transportation

authority board. In addition to requiring the executive to spend more time on mission and

policy (and less on the internal organization), the executive must spend more time in the

"care and feeding" of individual board members. In essence the board becomes a

creature of the executive's ability to build and form coalitions and less a reflection of

policy directives and guidance for the authority. It also makes it exceedingly difficult for

the executive to manage his or her organization, as resources, innovative practices, and

service improvements are delayed or obstructed by board members. It is also more likely

that decisions that result in customer complaints or concerns will be magnified by board

members and decrease confidence in the executive's leadership and the staff's ability.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation seeks to understand the relationship between public authority

board members and executives, an area of inquiry with comparatively little research

related to the board-executive relationship. When attempting to focus on the public

authority structure within the public transportation industry the problem looms greater, as

public transportation is heavily reliant on this structure with the most important element being the board-executive relationship. This dissertation seeks to understand this relationship and contribute to public transportation management and the field of public administration by employing multiple separately established theories and studies to examine the board-executive relationship: the public authority structure and its implications for governance and the dichotomy-duality model and framework of governmental processes.

The purpose of this research is to understand what factors impact executive-board relationships in quasi governments, which in turn contributes to policy and execution related to organizational purpose, as exemplified through the study of public transportation authorities. First, by applying existing models of local government functions to transportation authorities, we are better able to identify similarities between traditional and quasi-governmental organizations in order to understand the shifting lines of executive and board authority. Second, by studying the expectations related to board composition, agenda preferences and executive-board conflict, a deeper understanding of how organizational structure and formal authority may impact organizational performance is developed.

This research focuses on three research questions to provide this understanding:

1. What are the perceived roles of board members serving on public transportation authority?

2. Under what circumstances are public transportation authority board members more likely to seek involvement in decision-making that falls under the executive's authority?

3. What impact does this encroachment on executive responsibility have on board membership support for the executive?

Governing boards are stomping grounds for political players with political agendas and interests that may be focused narrowly on the organization's purpose of a broad base for impacting services community-wide. The first question is important because it informs on what individual board members are focused on—their perceptions of their actual and preferred roles and levels of involvement. We are able to see how board members see themselves and asks a simple question, "Why do board members do what they do?" These perceptions allow me to gauge their interest levels in impacting mission, policy, administration and management while "placing them" in the dichotomy-duality model (for conceptual purposes only). This research question also allows us to understand both the actual and preferred roles they play in the organization at the individual and collective level, permitting us to evaluate the member and board as a whole. Simultaneously, we are better able to understand what group the member sees as their "constituency" and how they represent them through their agenda preferences.

The second question targets how the issues wrapped up in individual vs. collective preferences, perceived vs. actual roles and representation manifest themselves. To follow the above trend of simplicity, "When do they do what they do?" What agenda does the board member have and in what ways is this agenda acted on? What factors trigger involvement in organizational administration and management—is it because their position requires it or because their individual preferences motivate them? Does this action and involvement come as a result of perceived constituencies and representation of because of their own specific preferences?

The third research question gets directly to the purpose of the dissertation and basically asks, "What does this mean for the executive?" What is the impact when the individual seeks a low-level agenda while the executive is pursuing a high-level agenda? What happens when the executive's service agenda (low-level) conflicts with interests of the individual? Is there a residual impact for the executive when board member agendas conflict? Do the factors in research questions one and two create a strain in the board-executive relationship and what impact does it have on board support for the executive?

This research is seeking to further understand and contribute to the scholarly literature on the public authority structure because structure matters. This dissertation is attempting to discover nuances in public authority performance and governance through exploration of the board-executive relationship in public transportation authorities. It is essential that research reflect back on why structure was created—the assurance of delivering efficient and effective public services through and organization subdivided between insulated policy formation and neutral execution of that policy. These research questions allow us to understand the extent to which this structure functions as designed and reflect on how the politics of administration operate within the dichotomy-duality framework. Board member role perceptions, how these perceptions manifest and the impact of this manifestation on the organization are central to this prescribed reflection.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

This dissertation is designed to inform on how the board-executive relationship impacts public authorities and examines the broad authority structure through the study of public transportation authorities. Public transportation provides an excellent forum for

this research because the industry has a long tradition of authorities and continues to be heavily reliant on the structure for governance and service delivery. As a result, the industry remains generally consistent in its application and trends; even with the multitudes of variation of both board and organizational scope and power the regularized features and performance objectives permit study across a diverse subset of authorities.

In studying public transportation authorities, a sampling frame constructed to meet the needs of the research methods employed in this study is essential. Considering the large number of authorities and available board members and executives eligible for inclusion in this research, a sample size must be small enough to permit the completion of the research yet is large enough to yield relevant data for thorough analysis. The sample must also remain *methodologically flexible* to fit the exploratory nature of the study, as this is an attempt to develop deeper understand and build toward theories of governance and models of public service delivery.

In selecting the sample from the national population of public authority boards, several conditions for inclusion were established. For purposes of consistency in information and comparison across individual responses, once an authority was selected for inclusion in the study, the executive and all individual members of the board were included in the sample provided the board member had served in their position for least six months. This ensures the member has sufficient opportunity to learn the norms and behaviors of the board and become familiar with the transportation system and executive. In cases where the board member has not filled their seat for six months and has been excluded from the sample the person previously holding that seat is included, so long as they have not vacated their position longer than six months. This time frame seeks to

exclude former board members who may have become unfamiliar with board activities and interaction with the executive.

This sample is further narrowed by selecting public transportation authorities from a single state. Within a single state there is increased likelihood for consistency in structure, powers and patterns of behavior due to limits of enabling legislation and regulation, state and local funding practices, institutional history and the general trend of organizations to model themselves after one another. For this study, authorities in Tennessee were selected for a number of reasons. First, access to board members and executives can be a significant obstacle to research, as this sample consists of political and elites. My position as a researcher from The University of Tennessee, the flagship state university, is expected to spark interest from subjects and access is further enhanced by my additional role as Chief Operating Officer at Knoxville Area Transit, the public transportation system for the City of Knoxville, Tennessee. As a transit professional, I have established contacts with public transportation executives across Tennessee, who can offer significant encouragement to board members to participate in this study. The selection of Tennessee's public transportation authorities as a sample is also beneficial for matters of convenience. As a practitioner, I have general knowledge of statewide public transportation activities and have specific knowledge of the systems included in the sample, which significantly reduces information costs in preparation for data gathering. Finally, as described above, Memphis was the epicenter of the major transition from private to public ownership of public transportation resources and the enabling legislation that permitted it ensures a certain level of consistency in the creation and governance among the authorities.

The authorities in this sample are from the cities of Memphis, Jackson, Nashville and Chattanooga, Tennessee in addition to Lexington, Kentucky. Lexington has been selected in place of Knoxville, Tennessee for methodological purposes[1]—namely my close working relationship with the Knoxville Transportation Authority board and executive at Knoxville Area Transit. Lexington has several similarities to Knoxville: both serve the same general geographic areas and population levels, have comparable organizational structures and board powers, operate similar numbers of vehicles and serve similar numbers of customers.

These cities are of particular interest for a number of reasons. First, local governments utilize public transportation authorities in five of the six largest urbanized areas in Tennessee and in the three largest urban areas in Kentucky and these cities represent five of these eight authorities (U.S. Census Bureau 2004; APTA 2005). Second, of these five authorities, all use different forms of the public authority structure with variation occurring in authority power, board size, executive role, and fiscal responsibility. These states permit, but do not closely regulate local government formation and management of these authorities. Third, the transit systems are different in terms of geographic area, service type, size of budget, and both the type and number of customers served. Despite this variation, these systems are relatively comparable in terms of range and size; no authority represents an excessively large or small system, which makes it much easier to draw comparisons. For example, Memphis provides 10.7 million passengers trips annually and the next largest is Nashville with 4.8 million

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[1] See Chapter II for a complete explanation of this substitution of the public transportation authority in Lexington, Kentucky for the authority in Knoxville, Tennessee.

passenger trips (NTD 2004). In Georgia, the Atlanta transit system provided 70.5 million

annual passenger trips in 2003 while the next largest system in Savannah, GA provided

only 3.6 million trips (NTD 2004), an excessively high variation.

While there is considerable scholarly literature available regarding board

composition and efficacy in the public, non-profit and for-profit sectors, there is little

work that examines the nature of the board-executive relationship with a focus on

understanding this relationship or its potential impact on organizational performance.

The empirical challenge for this particular study is the lack of understanding of what

factors impact the relationship creating a methodological problem regarding the types of

data needed, the variables for measurement as well as the process of analysis. This

dissertation is focused on developing a deeper understanding of the public authority

structure by exploring the factors impacting this critical board-executive relationship and

its implications for governance. While designed to both fill the literature gap on public

authority board-executive relationships and weaving together divergent aspects of

political science theory and models, the thrust of the research is the perceptions of board

members and executives of public transportation authorities. By understanding the

perceptions of board members and executives, a much clearer picture emerges regarding

how future research on public authority relationships may be studied and evaluated.

Considering the emphasis on the relationships between these groups—boards and

executives of public authorities—a study design that permits the cultivation of data that is

highly subjective and attitudinal necessitates the use of qualitative research methods

(Zeldich 1969; Devine 2002). Of the available research instruments, interviews are the

most effective mechanism for obtaining data, as interviews allow subjects to talk freely

and provide their own perspective on events or issues (Vidich and Shapiro 1969), which is most effective in gleaning data to inform on the stated research questions.

As Zeldich (1969, 17) describes, institutional norms and statuses are best judged through interviewing, as the technique is "the most efficient and hence best form" in comparison to other techniques of qualitative research. In this dissertation, the ability to obtain information on subjects' personal backgrounds, their perceptions and preferences related to board authority and power and what effect this has on the personal relationship between the board member and the executive is best obtained through the technique of personal interviews. A semi-structured interview process with a generalized agenda and pre-selected topics will provide structure; however, the format permits follow-up questions while "probing responses and ask[ing] for clarification or further elaboration" (Arksey and Knight 1999, 7).

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter Two presents the study design and methods. This dissertation examines the broad authority structure through the study of public transportation authorities because of the industry's strong reliance across a variety of structural formats. There remains a significant gap in available data on authorities in general, much less the relationship between executive and board members in public transportation authorities. This chapter discusses the research strategy in terms of the value of qualitative research and the available methods for data gathering considering the type of data required for this research and analysis. It also explains the rationale for personal interviews as the preferred qualitative research method, describes the sampling frame and choice of

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Tennessee for a sample (including descriptive statistics of the transit systems involved

and subjects selected for inclusion). Finally Chapter Two offers a detailed description of

the techniques used in the research; i.e., the techniques and questions employed to glean

information from the subjects and the analytical framework used to evaluate the research

questions.

Chapters Three and Four are heavily descriptive and present interview results

regarding relationships between individual board members and executives, board member

backgrounds and experience, and the various viewpoints on board roles and power

including representation. The chapter also presents findings regarding board member

agendas—relating to the authority—and the board member's actual and perceived roles

in terms of fiscal and high-level policy power. These chapters also examine the actual

and preferred roles in low-level policy formation as well as actual and preferred

involvement in administrative and management issues. In addition to considering the

findings at the individual level this chapter examines data at organizational and collective

levels, identifying differences and similarities in perspectives and preferences.

The research questions and expectations are evaluated in Chapter Five with an

analysis of the data in relation to available fiscal power and high-level policy and the

impact of this power to draw high-level policy players. Attention is paid to the

composition of board transportation authority boards and what impact board composition

has on support levels for the executive and the factors that influence the board-executive

relationship and the issues that lead to increased conflict among board members and

authority executives. Additionally the chapter answers the three research questions

pertaining to the perceived roles of public transportation authority board members and the

circumstances where these members seek involvement in decision-making under executive authority. Finally the chapter examines how this encroachment on executive responsibility impacts board members support for the executive.

The perspectives of board members offered in Chapters Three and Four with analysis conducted in Chapter Five culminate in Chapter Six's typology of board member preferences and behavior that articulates three distinct types of public authority board members in the areas of policy, advisory and community orientation further subdivided along lines of broad and narrow focus. This identification of six different board member types is then considered in relation to the dichotomy-duality model of local governance, which allows conceptual application of the model to public authority structures while adding a new dimension that expands the well-known and highly-tested model to consider individual preferences and incursions on executive authority along with implications for legislative-executive relationships.

Chapter seven concludes the dissertation. Focus is predominantly on evaluating what impact fiscal power has on board composition and political influence and the potential for these factors to increase board-executive conflict. These issues are discussed in consideration of the dichotomy-duality model and its applicability and utility in studying public authorities while examining other critical factors or components that should be contemplated. This chapter presents the full analysis of the research questions of board member preferences, the circumstances of managerial incursion and the impact on support for the executive. In addition to analysis of these issues and the applicable conclusions, this chapter outlines the ancillary results of the interviews in regards to other factors that have impacted board-executive relationships, allowing for a series of

recommendations of use to public authority executives and boards, especially those in

public transportation. This chapter also makes a number of general statements regarding

the value of public authorities and the implications of this research for public authorities

in general.

CHAPTER II

STUDY DESIGN AND METHOD

INTRODUCTION

To provide deeper understanding of the public authority structure and its implications for governance it is essential to develop an appropriate study design that answers the research questions outlined in Chapter One. This chapter details the study design, explaining the strategy of personal interviews to produce the data necessary to explore the relationships among fiscal authority, board composition and its impact on executive support while focusing on the subjective aspect of board-executive relationships. Chapter Two offers the rationale for selecting public transportation authority board members and executives in Tennessee and Lexington, Kentucky followed by a description of each transit system included in the study. This description outlines service-related elements such as ridership, fleet size and organization size—all standardized characteristics within the transportation industry to permit base-level system comparisons. This is supplemented with a summary of the authority including board structure and powers along with recent organizational history, key issues and future planning. The balance of the chapter is directed at data collection methods and techniques employed in the research process.

THE CHALLENGE OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Scientific research is a function of process and criteria "for deciding how conflict about differing views of reality can be resolved" while allowing "'consumers' of research

the ability to critically assess how evidence has been developed and used in reaching a conclusion . . ." (Hoover and Donovan 1995, 5). While elementary on its face, employing the scientific method—translated through varying research designs, populations, devices and techniques—is an object of intense scrutiny and controversy in the social sciences due to the complexity of human behavior. A successful study design overcomes many of the obstacles to effective social science and "guides the investigator in the process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting observations" (Nachmias and Nachmias 1976, 29) while progressing toward the contextual understanding of results.

Historically, case studies have been the most popular study design for research on public authorities for two main reasons. First, authorities tend to be organized around a single service or function, such as housing or port management, which permits researchers to examine and compare authority response to new services or program changes across multiple authorities. The benefit of the case study in authority research is that we are able to make somewhat larger, yet quite limited, generalizations "to theoretical propositions [but] not to populations or universes" (Yin 1994, 10). Comparative case studies are highly beneficial to this type of research, as they can "yield valid causal inferences", beyond the few cases when systematic description is employed to help identify key characteristics and phenomena (King, Keohane and Verba 1994). Second, case studies are frequently used to examine authorities because authorities are usually formed to solve highly complex and controversial issues and researchers will examine a single authority by focusing on its individual characteristics such as enigmatic leadership, distinctive organizational structures or exceptional results. In this instance, the research is heavily descriptive and surrounds very unique circumstances that have

virtually no applicability outside the organization but provide an understanding of the specific expectations that impacted the authority and its outcomes (Yin 1994).

This research is premised and designed differently from previous studies in light of the expectations stemming result from the loss of financial power and the three specific research questions all aimed at making broad generalizations about the effectiveness of public authorities based on the study of transportation authority board-executive relationships. While there is significant value in approaching this research design with a national study to make the study directly applicable to transit governance, the infancy of this research topic makes this highly problematic. Of primary concern is the lack of existing scholarly research on public authorities yielding applicable theories, models or data sets within the narrowed scope of authority board-executive relationships or posited research questions.

At the same time, a national study is exceptionally difficult due to the unique nature of public authorities. Authorities are atypical by design and are formed around the parent government's legal and cultural values within a framework created by the original enabling legislation, also shaped by group and individual preferences. This level of dissimilarity among authorities leads to the understanding—if not emphasis—that variables of fiscal control, board political prowess and board effectiveness are *relative* to the legal, political and cultural norms of the given authority's community. Organizational individuality exemplifies this key component of the authority structure and descriptions of legislative and fiscal authority patterns, similarity of characteristics among board members or organizational performance evaluation across specifically defined measures may help to eventually develop a model with potential for nationwide

applicability. While identifying existent patterns is important to the subject of public authorities and the impact of structure in public governance this research is focused on relationships. At this stage of the research process, we are exploring the degree to which the basic expectations about the relationship among fiscal power, board composition and political efficacy will be borne out.

The lack of established methodological approaches is also a challenge in developing this research design. Although this is a unique subject of study there is a considerable amount of existing research and method related to the duality-dichotomy model. This model has established an effective and methodologically sound approach to understanding local government structure by providing a conceptual demarcation of power between managers and councils along shared responsibility of dimensions of mission, policy, administration and management. The model uses these four dimensions to understand the processes and expectations of governance but utilizes a line to emphasize the fluctuations in the level responsibility for the city manager and the council.

The dichotomy-duality model recognizes actual and preferred power roles among executives and council members but does not focus on the resulting relationships between executives and councils. The study of well-defined, isolated variables such as fiscal control and board composition along with variables outlined in the dichotomy-duality model can stand alone for comparison; however, this study weaves together a number of divergent elements for greater understanding of authorities. No established or preferred methodological model or technique is distinctly tied to this type of study leaving open numerous alternatives for consideration.

The most important consideration in this study design is this research is seeking to understand—to explore the board-executive relationship within the public authority structure. This is a unique study of public authorities and there remains a gap in the research for those interested in both public authorities and governance in general. This research is a challenging first-step toward exploring the uncharted territory of board-executive relationships in public authorities. As Glaser and Strauss explain in *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, exploration results in the expansion of knowledge through an inductive process where initial, systematic research yields data on which theory may be grounded to avoid the "opportunistic use of theories that have dubious fit and working capacity" (1967, 4).

By focusing on conceptual clarity, cultivation of data and deep understanding of data, theory is built by the accumulation of evidence through exploration. From a scientific standpoint, exploration in the social sciences is defined as a "broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life" (Stebbins 2001, 3). Robert Stebbins explains, that phenomena tied to a group, process or activity that is believed to "contain elements worth discovering" must be approached with flexibility in looking for data and open-mindedness in where to find it (2001, 6). Most important is knowing where to look and Stebbins echoes Abraham Kaplan's (1998, 17) distinction between the logic of discovery through scientific intuition versus guesswork or trial and error in building a scientific body of knowledge (Stebbins 2001, 24). It is induction, deduction and exploration that are of value in the development of grounded theory and the expansion of knowledge.

SELECTION OF STUDY DESIGN

Qualitative Approach

This research is distinctly different from most existing research on public

authorities because emphasis is not on comparing functions or relative success of a type

or specified group of authorities, nor is it focused on the characteristics or composition of

a single particularly successful or flawed organization. The research is interested in

perceptions of executives and board members of public transportation authorities—data

that is highly subjective and attitudinal and which lends itself to qualitative methods of

research (Zeldich 1969; Holloway and Jefferson 2000; Devine 2002). Beyond the basic

concepts of attitude and perception, qualitative methods explore and capture experiences,

associated meanings and the interpretation of events. Most important, qualitative

methods directly capture the "thought processes or narratives that people construct" while

allowing individual and environmental contexts to emerge as part of the interview

process (Devine 2002, 199).

While some of the data sought can be obtained through surveys—especially data

related to descriptive characteristics, policy preferences and levels of executive support

(Sudman and Bradburn 1982; Holloway and Jefferson 2000) the research is focused on

the subjective nature of relationships. Survey instruments offer a highly structured

approach to ensure consistency of data across a statistical sample but a significant flaw in

survey as a technique is there is no environment to survey research, that —"findings will

have meaning only in the context of the 'survey domain' . . ." (Bostitis 1990, 42). This is

in direct comparison to other mechanisms to measure attitudes such as personal or

telephone interviews that "intrude as a foreign element into the social setting they would

describe, [that] create as well as measure attitudes, [and that] elicit atypical roles and responses" (Webb et al. 1981, 1 in Bostitis 1990, 42). Also, efficient and effective survey instruments that intrigue respondents and ask the right questions quickly and concisely to ensure a high response rate are not conducive to the unstructured free response necessary in this study.

Open-ended survey questions permit the latitude to cultivate opinions and ideas for the data required of this research (Holloway and Jefferson 2000); however, there are major concerns with a reliance on open-ended questions to bypass survey instrument limitations. The survey instrument is a document with no control over the length, depth or breadth of responses and follow-up questions cannot be tailored to responses. The instrument is painfully static in this regard. Simultaneously, open-ended questions are unappealing to respondents because they are time consuming and require writing out opinions and explanations—far less convenient than options of "circle one" or "check all that apply." In addition to a likely reduction of response rate due to an extended effort those with poor writing skills or are suspect of more probing questions will shorten or skip answers and introduce bias (Sudman and Bradburn 1982, 150-151; Johnson and Reynolds 2005, 285).

Interviewing as a Methodological Technique

For this study, the ability to obtain data on subjects' personal backgrounds, their perceptions and preferences related to board authority and power and what affect this has on the personal relationship between the board member and the executive is best obtained through the interview technique. Here the focus is on institutional norms and statuses, which are best judged through "the most efficient and hence best form" of interviews in

comparison to other techniques of qualitative research (Zeldich 1969, 17). Interviews

allow subjects to talk freely and provide their own perspective on events or issues (Vidich

and Shapiro 1969) and "allow people to tell their own story in language with which they

are familiar" (Devine 2002, 199). A semi-structured interview process with a specific

agenda and pre-selected topics provides sufficient structure and latitude in "probing

responses and ask[ing] for clarification or further elaboration" (Arksey and Knight 1999,

7). Most beneficial to the semi-structured process is the blending of both structured and

unstructured interview techniques to amplify benefits and mitigate pitfalls (Arskey and

Knight 1999, Table 1.3).

The subjects in this study are board members and executives in public

transportation authorities—political elites who exercise power on behalf of the public.

Interviewing elites can be a formidable task, as discussed extensively by Lewis Anthony

Dexter in the social science standard, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing* (1970). Dexter's

construct of elite interviewing expands beyond class and status; his description of an elite

interview subject is anyone receiving specialized, non-standard treatment. The

interviewer emphasizes 1) the subject's definition of the situation; 2) encourages the

subject to structure the account of the situation; and 3) permits the subject a high degree

of latitude in including what the subject feels is relevant instead of the interviewer's

assumptions. For Dexter, the focus shifts from an interviewer subject providing

responses to presupposed questions to an investigator "willing, and often eager, to let the

interviewee teach him what the problem, questions, the situation . . ." may be (1970, 5).

The interview process presents a significant series of challenges, most common is

the selection, identification and recruitment of subjects, all of which must occur before

researcher and subject actually conduct the interview itself. Access becomes a greater

obstacle when conducting elite interviews, especially when participants are political elites

with limited opportunity to participate and may be suspicious of research interviews and

agendas (Arksey and Knight 1999). Another significant challenge in any interview,

especially elite interviews, is subject familiarity. The ability to develop and ask questions

the "right way" to yield the correct data is difficult but the interview process allows the

subject to "teach" his or her perspective. For elite interviews, the interviewer must

prepare intensely for the interviews by developing in-depth knowledge of the topic and

issues but most important an understanding of participants and mannerisms, including

individual and group behavioral norms and practices, language specific to the subject and

a knowledge of others within the group.

Following the interview is the cumbersome process of transcribing tapes and

handwritten notes, repeating these steps until the population or sample is exhausted or

until the variation in answers ends. Once the information is assembled, only then can the

researcher begin to read, absorb, think, re-read and re-think until the analysis is complete

and a picture emerges from the data. Raw, contextual information from those

experiencing it can be analyzed and interpreted into results and understanding.

Selection of Interview Subjects

Ideally, this dissertation would include a national study of public transportation

authorities by interviewing the national population of transportation boards and

executives or a stratified random sample with possible stratification based on system size

(Henry 1990). However, approaching this from a national perspective study is premature

at this juncture. This study is exploratory, attempting to build toward a deeper

understanding of public authority governance and looking nationally when the research is in its infancy would be ineffective. Additionally, the subject and specific research questions dictate that qualitative research using elite interviews is the most appropriate method for this study design. Central to selection of this method of inquiry is whether the research can be completed as described (Dexter 1970; Arksey and Knight 1999). With the challenging research topic and the difficulty embedded within the interview technique—participant recruitment, access and subject knowledge—the pure logistics of a national sample in performing elite interviews is extremely prohibitive in terms of cost and time frame.

From a standpoint of feasibility and the value of the researched performed, the question is simple: what sample will best represent the population? Public transportation authorities in the southeastern United States comprises a probative sample, as they represent an extremely diverse group of states encompassing a variety of authority types, sizes and structures. Yet, the number of transportation authorities in the Southeast and the sheer size of the region present the same logistical and empirical challenges as a national study. Narrowing focus to a single state becomes a more logical approach, as the research can be performed within a reasonable amount of time and a single state creates a level of continuity that is more effective for a study of public authorities.

Tennessee and its public transportation authority board members and executives have been selected for inclusion in this study. Tennessee was selected for a number of reasons. First, there is an obvious level of convenience from a geographical and logistical perspective with this dissertation being completed at The University of Tennessee. Yet, the logistical benefits assumed are not as critical in consideration of the

use of telephone interviews. Telephone interviews permit selection of any transportation authority in the United States with the same logistical effort. What Tennessee offers has more to do with the performance of the interviews in terms of access to and recruitment of participants and the reduction of information costs required to properly conduct the interviews.

Tennessee was selected for another reason. Memphis, Tennessee was the epicenter of the transition from privately owned mass transportation to the public authority structure within public transportation. Local governments and services frequently model themselves after one another, as exemplified by the proliferation of the Memphis formula across the U.S.; Tennessee's transit systems' geographic and political proximity to Memphis creates an increased level of consistency in the organization of public authorities in the urban centers of Tennessee. Equally important is the assurance of consistent enabling legislation—a national or regional sample of authorities could pose problems related to high variation among state and local laws and the structure of authorities. By selecting Tennessee, we should see greater consistency through a single state especially when the state created the model on which almost every other state has based their transportation authority legislation.

There are number of significant benefits to this study design when focusing on Tennessee. Reiterating from Chapter One, local governments utilize public transportation authorities in five of the seven largest urbanized areas in the state (U.S. Census Bureau 2004; APTA 2005), all with varying forms of authorities and with considerable local government control. The systems vary in geographic area, service and budget but are relatively comparable without any system representing an excessively

large ridership. In 2005 Memphis provided 12.0 million passengers trips annually with the next largest ridership in Nashville with 8.0 million followed by Knoxville at 3.8 million (see Table 2.1, all tables located in the Appendix).

A final major benefit of selecting Tennessee is related directly to the elite interviewing technique. As described above, there are a number of significant, omnipresent obstacles in interviewing, especially elite and specialized interviewing. The first major one is access. In terms of access to interview participants, most obstacles were quickly eliminated due to my professional position of Chief Operating Officer at Knoxville Area Transit in Knoxville, Tennessee and status as a researcher with The University of Tennessee. I have established professional relationships with transportation executives across Tennessee through my involvement with the Tennessee Public Transportation Association (TPTA), Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) and system specific best-practice peer reviews and site visits. My position allows me direct and unfettered access to transit executives across the state. These executives were also able to provide accurate contact information for board members while encouraging their participation, which was extremely effective in gaining access to this normally challenging group of subjects.

The second major issue in elite and specialized interviewing is the researcher being knowledgeable enough to complete the interviews and garner data that will inform on the subject and permit detailed and thorough analysis of findings. The interviewee is permitted greater latitude in determining "what he regards as relevant, instead of relying upon the investigator's notions of relevance . . ." (Dexter 1970, 5). The investigator must be prepared for an interviewee providing nuances and interpreting situations through the

participant's eyes. An effective investigator must have a strong background and be adept

and fluent in the topic and language to understand responses, pose follow-up questions

and guide the interview (Dexter 1970; Arskey and Knight 1999).

I have had seven years of involvement with public transportation, the last six on

senior staff of the Knoxville public transportation agency, which is governed by a public

authority, albeit in a primarily advisory capacity. This experience provides expertise in

operational management, funding issues and allocation, board authority and awareness of

the political situations and implications associated with the authority structure. This

experience and work conducted on behalf of this dissertation provided more than

sufficient understanding and expertise to effectively perform this study. I am conversant

in public transportation terminology, trends and issues of nationally and those specific to

both Tennessee and Kentucky, which was critical in this study due to issues of research

bias described below.

My experience and professional interaction with the executive at KAT and the

Knoxville Transportation Authority board has created a high level of understanding and

awareness regarding the public authority structure and has fed much of the development

of the described ideas, exploration of expected patterns of relationships and research

questions. My employment with KAT—one of the five systems in Tennessee utilizing

the authority structure for public transportation governance—creates a direct conflict of

interest, as I am unusually close to the environment and actors that may introduce bias

within the study. Knoxville's authority board members may be reluctant to be

interviewed or answers could be entirely false, partially true or completely truthful but

incomplete and guarded out of concern for trust.

To eliminate this problem, I elected to substitute the public transportation authority of Lexington, Kentucky for Knoxville, Tennessee. This decision is based on several key factors, most important the relative similarities between the two cities and their respective transit systems and authority boards. Lexington does differ politically, employing unified city and county government formally titled the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government. The government services of Lexington reach approximately 260,000 people, while the City of Knoxville government serves 174,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). While this is a significant population variation, the daytime population of both Lexington-Fayette and Knoxville swell considerably during daytime. Knoxville expands dramatically at 46% and Lexington by only 11% to bring the daytime scope of service to 291,000 in Lexington-Fayette County and 254,000 for Knoxville (U.S. Census 2000b). Knoxville's metropolitan area is considerably larger than the Lexington-Fayette County area; however, the emphasis is on similarities in the urban areas and in particular the public transportation elements. The comparison of the public transportation system elements of Knoxville and Lexington are described in the section below.

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM DESCRIPTIONS

Memphis, Tennessee (Memphis Area Transit Authority)

The public transportation system of Memphis, Tennessee is the Memphis Area Transit Authority (MATA). MATA provides service to the city of Memphis, surrounding parts of the unincorporated areas of Shelby County, and several incorporated cities including Germantown and Collierville. MATA also operates subcontract services for West Memphis, Arkansas, just across the Mississippi River from Memphis.

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Total ridership for the MATA system exceeds 12 million passenger trips annually with a revenue fleet of 280 vehicles. Fixed route bus ridership is provided along 33 routes to 10.75 million passengers annually with 194 buses while approximately one million passengers are served annually through the 20-car streetcar system operating in revitalized, downtown Memphis. MATA-plus, Memphis's complementary paratransit[2] service, uses a fleet of 65 vehicles to deliver more than 250,000 trips to persons with disabilities. Approximately 600 employees deliver MATA services with 260 bus operators, 98 maintenance employees and an additional 200 support staff to provide customer information, on street supervision, service management as well as administrative functions. Of the 600 employees, nearly 400 are collective bargaining unit positions.

Presently, MATA's greatest challenge is the development and implementation of a new regional light-rail system to augment the expanded trolley rail system, including the recently added Madison Avenue line. The new $400 million light-rail plan has identified a Downtown-Airport corridor of which the FTA share may reach $200 million; however, some members of the Memphis city council are balking at the grant match requirement that will occur over the next five to seven years. The state of Tennessee, also struggling with capital funding for public transportation, must commit funds similar to the local match required of the city. Considerable local funds have been invested to match federal dollars for the expansion of the streetcar system and new indoor transfer

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[2] Paratransit service is generally used to describe non-fixed route services or flexible services and has gained in popularity due to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992, which requires all public transportation providers to offer services to persons with disabilities that are unable to used fixed route buses due to their disability.

centers over the past eight years and now political support is waning due to the city's budget issues. This declining support is not directed solely at MATA, as Memphis's riverfront redevelopment project has experienced similar struggles. The net impact is a particularly difficult political environment for public transportation in Memphis. While MATA presses hard for the expansion of services to support Memphis's economic growth and potential, the future of the light rail system is a subject that will shape discussion of public transportation in Memphis for the next twenty years.

Governance is provided to MATA by a seven-member board, all appointed to three-year terms by the mayor of Memphis and approved by the city council (see Table 2.2 for term comparisons for all boards). Board members are not term limited. The chair position, appointed by the mayor, serves for two-year terms and is not term limited. The vice-chair is selected from the board by the board membership for a one-year term and is also not term limited. Presently, the board membership is comprised of four men and three women, of which one man and two women are African-American. The MATA board is responsible for policy and oversight that falls into a number of primary duties: approval of all purchases and contracts over $50,000 (the executive may initiate purchases and contracts less than $50,000) including bidding and procurement procedures; approval and receipt of grant applications and funds; line item budget approval for submission to the city government; approval of new routes and schedules and changes to existing ones; setting public fares; holding public hearings; general oversight of route, budget and management performance with direct hiring authority over the president/general manager. The annual operating budget of MATA is $47 million with a capital budget of $18 million.

The general manager works directly for the MATA board; however, the board contracts for the Director of Operations position through First Transit, Inc. The Memphis formula from Chapter One delineates how a private company was established to separate MATA from the city through a private firm. The private firm is a presently a separate subsidiary of First Transit, Inc., a national company providing executive management and support functions on a contract basis. Through a competitive process, management firms such as First Transit, McDonald Transit and Professional Transit Management propose management candidates from a recruited pool of experienced managers along with possible services such as board and executive workshops or assistance in finance procedures. All MATA employees except the Director of Operations are employed by the First Transit subsidiary, including the President/General Manager.

The board has no involvement in taxi, limousine or industrial rail transportation—just public transportation services provided by MATA. Executive management of the system is the responsibility of the President/General Manager and a support staff that reports to the executive, who is then responsible to the board membership. The board utilizes a committee structure to review items on the board meeting agenda. There are four separate committees: Finance, Marketing, Service Development and Personnel, each with three board members that review and discuss proposals to provide feedback and questions prior to the formal monthly board meeting. Proposals are typically initiated and developed by staff for board review and vote; however, board members can direct MATA staff to develop items and proposals for board review by a majority vote.

Nashville, Tennessee (Metropolitan Transit Authority)

Operating in the state capital of Nashville and surrounding Davidson County, the

Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) is the second largest transit system in this study.

The MTA board is comprised of five members, two of who are women and include the

sole African-American on the board. Board members are appointed by the mayor and

approved by Nashville's consolidated city-county metropolitan government council

(a.k.a. Metro Council) to five-year terms with a two-term limit. Present board practice is

three-year terms for the chair and vice chair, although they are selected to that position

annually with a majority vote of the board. The board utilizes a committee structure for

three separate committees: Finance, Transportation and a Planning & Marketing

Committee. Each committee has two members that review proposals and agenda items

and offer discussion and feedback prior to the formal monthly board meeting.

Executive management is provided through a formal position of Chief Executive

Officer/General Manager that is contracted by, and reports directly to, the MTA Board of

Directors and has gone through considerable evolution in the past few years. Originally,

the general manager was the executive of the system and was selected through a

management contract with McDonald Transit Associates in a manner similar to that of

First Transit Memphis. The board selects the general manager from candidates who are

employees of the management firms and not the board or authority—the MTA board is

the client of the management firm. If the board decides the executive needs to be

removed from the system the board votes to contact the management firm who removes

the manager and offers other qualified replacements for selection by the board.

Although the board had control over the contract with McDonald Transit and the general manager, the board wanted greater oversight but did not possess the collective time or ability to adequately perform the level desired. When a performance and financial audit outlined a clear financial crisis—near insolvency—the board identified the necessity of someone working for, and directly accountable to, the board while directly managing and guiding the general manager on a day-to-day basis instead of the board's monthly meetings. In 2002, the board created the position titled Chief Executive Officer with national search for a candidate to hold ultimate managerial authority and better guide the organization. The success of the CEO position prompted abandonment of the management firm practice and on expiration of the contract it was decided to have the CEO absorb the title and functions of general manager.

MTA has undergone significant change in the past few years, expanding service and increasing ridership. In 2005 ridership reached 8.0 million passenger trips and can be attributed to an increased focus on professional staffing and planning, greater emphasis on capital allocation and vehicle replacement and the overall marketing of services. The total system ridership saw 7.85 million on the 38-route fixed route system, which includes a number of express route services for park-and-ride customers. The route system is supported by 137 buses while a fleet of 57 vehicles supports the 150,000 annual passenger's trips on the MTA's paratransit program. MTA employs 265 operators, 55 maintenance employees and approximately 110 on street, support, managerial and administrative personnel for a total of 430 employees, 320 of which are represented by the collective bargaining unit.

In addition to expanding and restructuring service, Nashville's focus is on the $40 million Music City Central Station intermodal transit hub in the downtown Nashville Central Business District. Having secured a location, funding and the support of the downtown community, the Central Station's construction will be underway by fall 2006. Service improvements bolstered by increased funding have allowed MTA to move out of its fiscal crisis and expand its operating budget to $37 million annually in concert with a growing capital budget of $13 million. As in Memphis, the board has oversight of MTA's comprehensive operation with specific powers of policy and authorization for all purchases and contracts over $100,000, including: vehicles and services; approval and receipt of grant applications and funds; line item budget approval prior to submission to the Metro Council; approval of new routes and schedules and changes to existing ones; setting public fares; holding public hearings; general oversight of route, budget and management performance with direct hiring authority over the CEO/general manager.

Chattanooga, Tennessee (Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority)

Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA) offers the most unique and diverse set of services within Tennessee, operating fixed route and paratransit programs in addition to the Lookout Mountain Incline Railway and an electric vehicle shuttle system in the downtown core to connect two CARTA-owned and managed parking garages with downtown businesses and attractions. The Incline railway is a well-known tourist attraction to the popular Lookout Mountain and transports more than 436,000 passengers per year at a profit to help support the bus, electric shuttle and paratransit services. CARTA's sixteen bus routes serve more than 1.7 million passenger boardings annually with a fleet of 54 buses. The paratransit fleet's 14 vehicles provide

40,000 trips per year while the Downtown Shuttle serves 1.0 million passengers through a fleet of 12 all-electric vehicles. With 165 employees, 100 of whom are operators, 35 maintenance, 30 support and administrative personnel (100 in the collective bargaining unit), the 3.2 million passengers that use CARTA services have a variety of options to move about Chattanooga.

Several new projects are on the horizon, first of which is the inclusion of on street parking within the scope of management and authority of CARTA. CARTA's experience in successfully managing two downtown parking garages prompted this move by city administration. The need for increased parking to support downtown activity has CARTA working on plans for a third parking garage that will join the others in funding the Downtown Shuttle's service. The largest board in the sample governs these diverse services and of the eleven members on the board there are eight men, three women and four African-Americans (three men and one woman). With oversight of a $13 million operating budget, an average $5.0 million capital budget and several major construction projects with combined value of $10 million, the board is actively involved in a number of programs and services throughout Chattanooga.

The executive director reports to a board appointed by the mayor of Chattanooga and approved by city council for five-year, non-staggered terms and no member or officer of the board is term limited, allowing for a high level of continuity in the board's responsibilities of policy and oversight. The exception is a single board member appointed by the Hamilton County executive to provide voice for the $100,000 the county supplies to support service to an outlying retail area. The board approves all contracts including legal, auditing, accounting and architectural services as well as all

vehicle and equipment purchases. The board treasurer signs off on all expenditures over

$2,000 regardless of purpose. The board reviews and votes on all grant applications and

receipt of funds; performs line item budget review for approval before submission to the

mayor and council; advice, counsel and review of the union contract; approval of new

routes and schedules and changes to existing ones; setting public fares; holding public

hearings; general oversight of route, budget and management performance and direct

hiring authority over the executive director.

Executive management of the system is the responsibility of the executive

director and support staff. The board utilizes a committee structure comprised of five

committees: 1) the Incline Committee to oversee the Lookout Mountain Incline; 2) the

Downtown Committee for the shuttle and parking garages; 3) the Executive Committee

that reviews budget, finance and labor management issues; 4) a Service Planning

Committee to provide input on routes and services; and 5) a Strategic Planning

Committee to help shape the long-term vision of CARTA.   Each committee has three

board members to provide insight and ask questions to help guide staff before the formal

monthly board meeting. As with most authorities, proposals are initiated and developed

by staff for board review and vote with guidance provided by the committees.

Jackson, Tennessee (Jackson Transit Authority)

The Jackson Transit Authority (JTA) is the public transportation system of

Jackson, Tennessee located approximately ninety miles east of Memphis. JTA is the

smallest transportation system in this study and is the smallest formal authority in the

state of Tennessee in terms of budget, fleet and ridership. For the past three years, a

storm that spawned a series of tornadoes and destroyed large sections of the city has

shaped the focus and literally the landscape of Jackson. This city is still recovering from the disaster and decisions made in the storm's aftermath permeate all aspects of the community, especially in public transportation. New construction and development are competing with the rebuilding areas for resources and attention and creates a citywide need for transportation; however, Jackson's limited financial resources make it difficult for JTA to expand much less maintain present services.

A total of thirty-eight employees provide and support service to eight fixed routes with thirteen buses and a complementary paratransit service with a fleet of seven vans. Of thirty-eight employees, 25 are bus and paratransit operators and 6 are in maintenance for a remaining seven employees not in the collective bargaining unit. The JTA provides approximately 480,000 passenger trips annually: 446,000 on its fixed route system and 34,000 through paratransit service. The struggles to rebuild Jackson are mirrored by JTA. Housed in an outdated facility not large enough to allow for effective maintenance and operations of its growing and modernized vehicle fleet, JTA has been stockpiling federal state and local capital funds to build a new operations and maintenance facility. The city is attempting to use in-kind property for local match funds but has had difficulty obtaining environmental approval and commitment from TDOT to provide a consistent stream of funding to begin and complete the project. If this site is not deemed non-compliant with environmental codes there may be issues related to additional city-owned property or the cash contribution required of the city for project fruition.

The new maintenance and operations facility is the primary focus of the board and executive management, as this modernized facility is expected to be the watershed of public transportation service and support in Jackson. The board is comprised of seven

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members appointed to five-year terms by the mayor and approved by city council. Board members are limited to two terms and the board president (chair) and vice-president (vice chair) are selected by the board membership. The terms of the president and vice president are limited only by their tenure on the board. The board has one woman and six men serving, of which four men are African-American. The board is limited to services provided by JTA and responsible for policy and oversight similar to the systems described above. Powers include: approval of all purchases and contracts over $10,000; approval and receipt of grants; budget approval and approval of the union contract; approval of new routes and schedules and changes to existing ones; setting public fares; holding public hearings; and the general oversight of route, budget and management performance. The annual operating budget of JTA is $2 million with a generally consistent capital funding stream of $400,000 annually.

The board also selects the executive management via an operational management contract with First Transit, also through a competitive process. The general manager is the employee of First Transit and the board is the client. The general manager serves at the will of the board via the contract with First Transit. Executive management of the system is vested in the general manager and support staff that reports to the executive, who is then responsible to the board membership. The board does not use a committee structure or pre-meeting workshop format. Business and discussion is conducted at the monthly board meetings.

Knoxville, Tennessee (Knoxville Area Transit)

Knoxville Area Transit (KAT) provides public transportation service to the City of Knoxville under the Knoxville Transportation Authority (KTA). KAT has

significantly expanded services over the past five years through a major partnership with

The University of Tennessee to provide transit services to the flagship campus in

Knoxville and a separate revitalization of an established but once-declining downtown

trolley system. These efforts combined with fixed route and paratransit service grew

ridership to more than 3.3 million passenger trips in fiscal year 2005 with an operating

budget of $14.5 million and a capital budget of $850,000. This capital funding does not

include nearly $20 million in allocated funding for an intermodal facility to be located the

heart of downtown Knoxville. This project has had a number of setbacks surrounding the

solidification of a construction site within the downtown core, despite secured FTA

funding. This project has been in planning phase for more than five years and is the most

significant challenge facing the organization. This facility is the hub of mass transit for

the third largest city in the state of Tennessee and like in Nashville is extremely important

for the sustenance of the system.

What is distinct about KAT's services is the use of specialized services to

augment its core services. Of its 3.3 million passenger boardings, approximately 1.5

million trips came from university (1.1 million), trolley (450,000) and paratransit

(50,000) programs and services for a core system ridership of approximately 1.5 million

passenger trips. This level of ridership is extremely high in both university and fixed

route (15 routes) service in consideration of the limited size of the university campus and

the relatively small urban population of the city limits. KAT services are maintained by

an organization of approximately 270 employees, of which 175 are bus operators, 45

mechanics and service employees and 55 various other support and administrative staff.

There are approximately 225 employees in the collective bargaining unit. On street

service is provided by 121 revenue vehicles, of which fourteen are trolley buses, thirty-one are paratransit vehicles and finally a fixed route bus fleet of seventy-six vehicles. Executive management of the general manager is provided through a management contract between the City of Knoxville and Professional Transit Management similar to that of Jackson and what once existed in Nashville.

Oversight of KAT is provided through the KTA, which varies considerably from authorities described above. The KTA is not limited to oversight of the transit system, providing oversight of all ground transportation services in Knoxville including community services organizations, van pools and taxi services. While the board has these additional sources of authority, focus is on KAT and taxi cabs, including appeals of taxi license denials and taxi fare rates. The most important difference from other systems described is the primary role of the KTA as an advisory board. The City of Knoxville did not establish KAT/ KTA as a truly separate entity, as the city requires KAT to operate very closely in terms of utilizing procurement, technical and legal services of the City of Knoxville. This significantly reduces the involvement of the board in terms of contracts and procurement; however, the KTA must formally approve all grant applications, the capital program of projects for capital grant purchases and sets public fares for all routes and services. The board has a decreased level of involvement in the budgetary process but does approve the budget for recommendation to the mayor and city council.

Unlike the other systems described above and Lexington below, the KTA board does not have control of the management contract. The City of Knoxville initiates the request for proposals and oversees the selection process, including control of the selection committee and awarding of the contract, which must be passed by city council.

The mayor of the City of Knoxville accepts the recommendation of the committee and the general manager of KAT serves at the pleasure of the mayor via Professional Transit Management's obligation to provide a general manager. If the mayor requests replacement, the firm will provide candidates for interview and replacement for selection through a method deemed acceptable by the mayor. In this instance, the executive truly has two separate masters—the mayor who controls the organization's funding, fate, project authorization and direct employment *and* a nine-member board that votes on the proposals for service changes fares and oversees financial and operational performance.

The KTA is very similar to the other transportation authorities in most other ways. The mayor appoints seven of the nine members of the KTA board with council approval. One additional board member is selected by the city council from their own membership and the final board member is selected from the Community Advisory Committee to Knoxville Area Transit, a group of community stakeholders that includes passenger, business and government representatives. Terms are not limited, with exception of the chair, vice-chair and advisory committee positions (two years each). The city council representative is not term-limited by KTA bylaws but rather city charter, which results in natural turnover of that position due to term limits. The board approves all service changes, conducts public hearings and reviews the financial and operating performance as measured through expenditures, revenue, ridership and general system operation.

Lexington, Kentucky (LexTran)

The most interesting system context in this study is LexTran in Lexington, Kentucky, a city with government and university programs providing the bulk of employment and economic development in the area. Unlike KAT, which was able to

overcome the industry's financial woes of the 1980s and 1990s through more supportive

local funding and increased capital support while leveraging a large university services

contract during the early part of this decade, LexTran struggled financially to the brink of

collapse. Beset with declining financial support from federal, state and local sources,

LexTran reached a breaking point during 2002 – 2003. The system had slowly

eliminated routes, decreased service hours, depleted its administrative support staff

through attrition and non-replacement and was in a downward spiral. Within this

environment unfolded an extremely poor labor-management relationship with the local

union and meanwhile general managers struggled to keep themselves and the system

afloat. The eight-member LexTran board, responsible for governance and direction of

the system experimented with professional management contracts, then direct

employment of executive management but decided new direction was needed to improve

the system and a management firm was hired to provide that direction. The board

selected Professional Transit Management with a new general manager that lasted only a

few months before being replaced by another, now present, general manager.

With its third general manager in a six-month period, LexTran was barely

surviving yet had ironically been green-lighted in June 2004 to place a property tax

referendum on the November 2004 ballot of consolidated Lexington-Fayette County

Urban Government. The referendum was pushed forward by local businesses and the

LexTran board in recognition of the link between public transportation and economic

development, especially within the service-oriented economy and the area's desperate

need for entry-level workers. Needing a normal eighteen months to prepare the

marketing, advertising and political campaign necessary to raise support for the

referendum the entire process was condensed into a six-month effort. Lacking open political support of the mayor and council, many of whom would stand for re-election that November, LexTran approached the referendum with a grass-roots effort. Focusing on the university community, local churches, low-income neighborhoods, social service agencies, small business and industries reliant on minimum wage and entry level workers, LexTran board members and employees worked tirelessly to educate and inform the citizens of Lexington.

When the referendum passed, LexTran had established a dedicated stream of revenue that would allow it to not just survive but prosper. While the transit industry raised fares and reduced service to offset the massive fuel costs of 2005 – 2006 (see Chapter Three for a more detailed description), Lexington has restored lost services and maintained lower fares. LexTran is the only authority in this study that did not pass or prepare for a fare increase in the last year for the direct purpose of maintaining budget. Change has been focused on returning lost service in critical areas while looking at lucrative opportunities to expand ridership and grow revenue. Yet, change is slowed by two factors. First, the hiring and training of new employees, developing new routes and services and procuring equipment—all while readying the organization and the community for new service—is a long process of planning and development where patience is highly valued and extremely necessary. Second, there is keen awareness within LexTran (especially the board) that taxpayers have placed trust in LexTran and funding must be deliberately spent for an effective, efficient and highly used system.

Despite this success, there is a high level of labor-management tension playing out politically with union leadership approaching elected officials, board members and

the media to create increased awareness of problems in the community. The result is considerable discord among employees, creating difficulty in system governance and management despite a very positive era in LexTran's history. The board has been pulled into a number of issues surrounding labor issues and despite best efforts to keep a distance it has pervaded board functioning and is a source of concern for city leaders, the board and the general manager.

The board is evenly split with four men and four women, although there is only one African-American female member due to the relatively recent resignation of a male African-American board member. Board members are limited to two four-year terms and are appointed by the mayor and approved by metro council to oversee the present LexTran operations of 133 employees (91 operators, 19 maintenance and 23 support and administrative personnel of which 110 are in the collective bargaining unit). Of these employees, 51 positions have been added in the past 12 months. There are presently 51 revenue vehicles to support the 18 fixed routes that LexTran operates with an expected August 2006 roll-out of four new routes supported by the addition of seven leased buses for a fleet total of 58. With system ridership exceeding 2.0 million in 2005 and a 2006 ridership of 2.8 million, Lexington is clearly progressing. Of the $15.1 million FY2006 available operating budget, $11.mmillion was actually expended to operate and support service allowing the $4.6 million surplus from the dedicated funding to combine with the capital budget of $3.7 million to procure new equipment and implement initiatives.

KAT and LexTran System Comparison

LexTran ridership is significantly lower than KAT's, as the University of Kentucky (in comparison to The University of Tennessee) contracts with LexTran for a

minimal level of service on two routes that combine for a ridership of 660,000 annual

passenger trips. Additionally, LexTran annually contracts with the local Red Cross at a

cost of $1.8 million to provide approximately 110,000 paratransit trips per year for

complementary paratransit rather than directly operate the service. When stripping away

KAT's higher-levels of university, paratransit, downtown trolley system and additional

services the gap for comparison between Knoxville and Lexington lessens considerably,

with Knoxville providing nearly 20% more passenger trips; however, Lexington has

reestablished itself and is beginning to mirror the progressive approach KAT has taken

over the past five years. The approximate difference in the number of passenger trips is

450,000, transit buses are 7 and employees are 35 when accounting for the high level of

non-core system services KAT offers. The overall ridership gap between the two systems

in 2005 was 1.3 million passengers but in 2006 narrowed considerably to a difference of

only 600,000 total passenger trips due to LexTran's massive service increases. It is

within this scope, along with the demographic similarities between the cities described

earlier in the chapter that allows for reasonable comparison of these two systems.

Similarities also exist between LexTran and KAT in terms of the organizational

management via the board and executive. Both executives have been system heads for

comparable periods of time—two and five years in Lexington and Knoxville respectively.

These lengths are close considering executive tenure ranges from more than 30 years to

two years, and Professional Transit Management employs both general managers for

executive management and consultation under contract. The authorities have similar size

with eight voting members in Lexington and nine in Knoxville.

The LexTran board approves all purchases and contracts over $50,000, directly approves the budget with near-final budget authority and directly oversees the Professional Transit Management contract. The board's near-final budget authority is due to state statute that requires the budget to go before the mayor and council; however, they typically approve it "as is" because the board has already formally approved the budget. The LexTran board shares very similar functions with the KTA in terms of responsibility for policy and oversight: approval of grant applications; new routes and schedules and changes to existing ones; public fares and hearings; and general oversight of route, budget and management performance—including direct involvement with the management firm. There are clear differences in terms of fiscal power, as the City of Knoxville is the fiscal agent of KAT and provides direction and oversight of procurement and contracts, although the KTA does have voting authority over the annual program of projects and can direct the reallocation of capital planning and expenditures.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Research for this dissertation proceeded in two stages. Stage one was a pretest of interview questions for the board members and executive in the sample. The pretest was conducted with the executive of KAT and board members of the Knoxville Transportation Authority because they were eliminated from the study sample as described above. This process allowed for refinement of interview techniques to ensure questions were crafted to elicit the appropriate response and to determine how respondents reacted to more probing follow-up questions supplied by their answers. Following each of these pretest interviews the content was discussed to identify questions

and areas where they felt a tendency to be reserved in responses while offering suggestions for taking advantage of opportunity to draw out more detailed answers on potentially controversial subjects. This post-interview discussion also allowed for explanation of question purpose and interview subjects provided feedback regarding question content and intent and how they or other respondents might feel in revealing certain types of information. No part of the responses from the pretest process was included in the findings, analysis or conclusions.

Once pretesting was complete, stage two of the research began. Stage two began by first making telephone contact with all the executives of the five transit systems who agreed to participate in the study. All executives in the five transit systems were included in the sample. I followed up with recruitment letters and sought their further assistance in recruiting board members by obtaining board information, including position, term length, mailing addresses and other avenues of contact. The executives also indicated a willingness to encourage board participation, even going so far as to agree to mention the research project at workshops and send out e-mails.

Recruitment letters were then sent to the board members by system in phases to elicit clustered and delayed responses, attempting to create limited waves of responses and scheduling to cluster interviews for subject topical continuity. Follow-up telephone calls, e-mails and re-mailing allowed me to focus on system boards and schedule interviews in clusters. Past and present public transportation authority board members of these five systems were included in the study. Past members must have completed their term no more than one year prior to the date of the interview and were only included if the person filling the seat they vacated had been serving on the board less than six

months. This was done to ensure all board members had sufficient time to learn the

formal and informal powers and roles while simultaneously avoiding interviews and data

from board members who had been removed from the processes for too long of a period

and might skew data.

Interviews were scheduled to have as many interviews as possible occurring from

the same transportation system before moving on to the next system. For example, in this

study as many Memphis board members as possible were interviewed before moving on

to Nashville, followed by Chattanooga, Jackson and finally Lexington. This approach

could not be rigidly followed for several reasons. First, some board members were slow

to respond to recruitment letters, telephone calls and e-mails, meanwhile I was receiving

a strong response and had need to schedule interviews with board members from the next

subsequent system. A small grouping, at least one board member from every transit

system—after considerable effort to contact them—either directly declined to participate

or indirectly declined by failing to acknowledge the original mailings, follow-up mailing,

telephone calls and e-mails (where possible). Efforts were not abandoned after several

weeks of attempts and this would have unreasonably and excessively delayed the

research process and seriously impaired my ability to recruit and retain executive and

board member participation as interest would weaken over time. Also, a number of the

interviews required rescheduling because of additional commitments on part of the board

member. Several of these required rescheduling to dates where I had already planned

interviews with the next system and could not maintain the rigid schedule without

sacrificing professionalism and a genuine risk of offending elite interview subjects and

compromising the overall study.

Of the forty-three individuals in the original sample, thirty-seven participated for an overall response rate of 84%. All five executives and thirty-one of the thirty-eight board members participated in the study for executive and board response rates of 100% and 82% respectively. Of the six that did not participate, five declined directly or through non-acknowledgement and one was excluded from the research due to the study design-imposed requirement of at least six months experience on the authority board. The individual this board member replaced could not be reached due to professional commitments, which had actually spurred this individual's original resignation. Of the six that declined, only two directly informed me they would not participate. The remaining four did not acknowledge the multiple attempts to contact them and efforts were abandoned after approximately six weeks.

There were a total of thirty-seven interviews of board members and executives with seven from Memphis, five from Nashville, ten from Chattanooga, six from Jackson and nine from Lexington (see Table 2.3). Interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted anywhere between 30 - 100 minutes in length, as determined by breadth, depth, interest and willingness of the interview subject. Almost all interviews ranged between 55 – 65 minutes. They occurred between April 28, 2006 and June 30, 2006 using a semi-structured interview process where pre-selected questions, approved by The University of Tennessee Office of Research, were asked of board members with separate questions for executives (see Tables 2.4 and 2.5). Some questions were the same for both executives and board members and most touched on the same general topics but were crafted to board or executive responsibility and perspective.

Follow-up questions were based on subject responses and in some instances individual questions or question lines were abandoned during the interview because participant answers to certain questions answered later questions or rendered them unnecessary. The participant's level of interest and expertise in certain question lines or subject matters, and the general direction in which the participant guided the interview, also impacted question flow. In these instances, efforts were made to touch on the main themes of questions to provide sufficient data to compare responses and gain sufficient data to properly evaluate the propositions and answer the research questions.

CONCLUSION

It is the data, collected through the interview process described above, which is summarized extensively in Chapters Three and Four. Chapter Three's emphasis is on the perspectives of executives and Chapter Four is dedicated to board member responses. Data was approached at the overall level and the individual level where appropriate to allow for analysis of group and personal perspectives in consideration of the expectations and the research questions. The chapters offer descriptions of transit system executives and board members followed by in-depth summaries of the interviews and data related to executive and board member perspectives. Attention is on the roles, formal and informal responsibilities and individual agendas as they relate to policy and management authority. This discussion then examines the various viewpoints on board and executive roles in consideration of the respondent perspectives on agendas and actual and preferred responsibilities.

**EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
AUTHORITIES**

INTRODUCTION

The essence of this study is understanding what factors impact the critical

relationship between an executive and his or her board. The discussion to this point has

provided a substantial argument that the executive-board relationship may be the most

difficult and sensitive partnership in public administration, as it involves clear political

agendas and strong demands for technical expertise and apolitical administrative and

executive leadership in an environment of intense oversight and accountability. Yet in

most public authorities neither the board nor the executive has its own elected

constituency; almost all are appointed by a single political entity and approved by a

separate political body. All the while the board and executive have the body politic as

stakeholders and shareholders with the public authority and organization charged with

greater challenges and expectations for performance.

As a result, the understanding of both the board-executive relationship and what

impacts it is of vital importance to governing the delivery of public service and the quasi-

governmental phenomenon within public transportation. This chapter first provides brief

context of the impact of rising fuel costs on public transportation, as alluded to in Chapter

Two, before moving into an overview of the executives' experience before examining

their perspectives on public authorities and boards. Perspectives are summarized

surrounding five emergent issues: 1) executive focus; 2) formal responsibilities and

effectiveness; 3) informal responsibilities and effectiveness; 4) political effectiveness of

board members; and 5) the relationships and the factors influencing these relationships.

The chapter concludes with a review of the emergent themes and aspects of the board-executive relationship and how executives effectively manage the organization and their boards.

THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FUNDING AND FUEL COSTS

The understanding of a single issue is critical to understanding public transportation over the past two years—the cost of diesel fuel. Historically, diesel fuel has been relatively inexpensive and cost effective for the public transportation industry with prices at a generally low, consistent rate with slight variation by region or market fluctuation. During 2004, unleaded and diesel fuel costs grew considerably, forcing public transportation systems—including other public services reliant on vehicle use such as police and fire—into a budget crisis. Most transit systems reallocated budget items, had costs absorbed by the parent government or had minor revenue increases to manage the increased cost with minor issue. In September 2005, Hurricane Katrina's impact on the U.S. fuel market drove prices to more than $2.00 per gallon when most public transportation systems in the Southeast budgeted $1.35 - $1.50 per gallon, numbers well above the anticipated market. An industry reliant on fuel has been in fiscal control mode since. Initial concerns were directed at the fuel supply with questions of whether the storm would create a diesel and unleaded fuel supply shortage. Serious discussion was held at the state and national levels regarding how the industry would handle an outright fuel shortage similar to the 1970s. As fuel production levels returned, shortage concerns

were alleviated but there was no meaningful cessation of fuel prices, especially in the diesel market on which all public transportation systems rely.

When unleaded fuel prices for the average American exceeded $3.00 per gallon in fall 2005, public transportation received greater awareness and ridership from the non-transit dependent commuter but attention was short-lived as Americans adjusted to high fuel costs and returned to single occupancy vehicle use. Mass transit saw a ridership and revenue increase, even retaining some long-term riders from this period. The problem is the ridership and revenue spike, and small number of regular riders they retained, was negligible in comparison to the massive budget shortfall the industry faced in fiscal year 2006. The high price of fuel and the resulting budget shortfalls were undoubtedly the most pressing issues industry-wide.

Fuel budgets of most public transportation systems have doubled in the past three years from 2005 to the proposed budgets of 2007. Each transit system in the United States has been directly impacted by the cost of fuel and while each individual system has its own local projects and concerns, the fuel cost problem presented a budget management crisis. Boards and executives have been forced to make difficult financial decisions that have resulted in fare increases, service reductions in terms of routes, frequency and hours of operation, the cancellation of marketing and development programs and the elimination of support staff positions in order to meet budget requirements. This is juxtaposed with a national trend of increasing annual public transportation use when fuel costs are hitting Americans at home and riders need transportation most. As a result, each of the transit systems described below have been embroiled in budget, expenditure and revenue issues, all while trying to balance the needs

and wants of its users vs. the fiscal solvency of public services. All but one of these systems had a fare increase or service reduction (some both) and only one of those had a fare increase in the previous ten years.

EXECUTIVE BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTIONS

Five public transportation authority executives (herein referred to as executives, general managers, GMs or similar regardless of formal title) were included in this study and present an extremely diverse set of experiences. Of the five GMs, none has traveled an even remotely similar path to date. In Memphis, Will Hudson—the single African-American executive in this study—has been associated with MATA for forty two years, beginning as a bus operator in the segregated South during a time when black drivers where required to have college degrees while white counterparts needed only a high school diploma. Moving from driver to operations supervisor and director with experience in route planning and scheduling, then marketing and customer service, Hudson became GM in 1993 after a nation-wide search to replace the previous executive. The previous GM had resigned after a political falling-out with the mayor and board appointments. While on staff at MATA, Hudson witnessed the impact of the board-executive relationship, the value it offers and the obstacles it presents.

With forty-two years experience, thirteen as executive, Hudson has the most experience in the industry and within an individual system; however, he has the second longest tenure of executive management at their present system. CARTA's Tom Dugan, has been executive since 1980. Graduating with a Masters in City Planning from Ohio State University, Dugan worked briefly for the Ohio Department of Transportation and as

a consultant to the city of Lima, OH before becoming directly involved in public transportation management in Ft. Wayne, IN. When there, he decided to move into executive management as GM or assistant GM (AGM) and within two years was at CARTA as the AGM. When the GM moved on, Dugan ascended to the GM position and has served there since, with exception of brief career change in 1985 - 1986 but was asked by the CARTA board to return due to failing health of the acting GM. Since, Dugan has retained the seemingly unwavering support of the board, most of whom have ten or more years of service with CARTA.

Another executive in the study with a long history in management is Paul Ballard of the Nashville MTA, although his tenure in Nashville began just four-and-a-half years ago in January 2002. Like Hudson, Ballard worked his way from the front lines as a brakeman on the Boston & Maine Railroad and then the campus bus system in Bloomington, IN as a mechanic before becoming a driver, supervisor and then supervisor in charge of training. When Bloomington's city service opened, Ballard became general manager for a brief period before serving in the same capacity in Winston-Salem, NC. Ballard then spent ten years as a regional vice president for a national management firm, which held numerous contracts throughout the South and Mid-west, before Ballard became GM in St. Louis, MO. He returned to management firm corporate offices as president for four years and after leaving opened his own consulting firm, providing interim executive leadership for transit systems before accepting the position of CEO in Nashville. Although Ballard has several years of diverse experience, he has just established himself in Nashville and has nearly the same level of experience at his system as the other two executives, both in their first efforts as GMs. Ballard has quickly gained

board and staff respect with his turnaround of what one board member called an "embarrassment" due to the disarray of system of the state capital.

Johnny Gullett, general manager of JTA in Jackson, TN, began his transit career in Nashville, TN as the Director of Maintenance before moving to Charlotte, NC as the AGM of Maintenance for the Charlotte Transit Authority (CTA). When the management firms changed, Gullett was out in Charlotte and found himself as a candidate for the general manager's job in Jackson, TN. Gullet had grown up in Memphis with ties to Jackson, making it look like a perfect fit except for problems JTA had recently faced. The previous GM had left among of a swirl of controversy that included arrest on charges of misappropriation of public funds (charges were eventually dropped). This coincided with a very intense board-executive relationship where strong sentiments of several black board members insisted that JTA management be representative of the ridership and workforce, demanding black leadership at executive and senior management levels. The replacement of perceived problem board members and the addition of Gullett at the helm since August 2003 have quelled concerns. His first foray into a GM position and reporting to a board has been successful to date.

Like Gullett, Teri Garcia-Crews, the sole female GM and sole executive or board member of Hispanic descent, is quite new to executive leadership and board responsibility but had served as an AGM prior to LexTran. LexTran was actually her second official GM job, serving briefly as interim-GM in Poughkeepsie, NY, but with no board and the city administration as the client. Garcia-Crews moved to Lexington in summer 2004, via New York and Tucson, where she had attended the University of Arizona and obtained a degree in Business Administration before working in the private

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sector banking industry. First becoming involved in transit management as the Director of Marketing for SunTran in Tucson, Crews has accepted the challenge of overseeing an entire operational organization. Garcia-Crews took the reins of leadership during an extremely difficult time and is just starting her third year in Lexington.

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE BOARD-EXECUTIVE RELATIONSHIP

Executive Focus

While these five GMs have extremely divergent backgrounds in education, experience, career path and tenure, more often than not they speak with the same voice when discussing their roles and responsibilities. All are focused on a single primary issue—budget and finance. While the financial crisis caused by fuel prices placed focus on fuel budgets and shortfalls, the executives have described fiscal management and solvency as the single most important aspect of their regular duties. Two executives came about their present positions due to near bankruptcy of their respective systems in Nashville and Lexington. Even with more stable funding these executives remain budget focused because as one illustrated, "Funding is the key and you can never relax from it." Another executive, when asked if their focus had changed after taking charge and resolving the initial fiscal problems of the authority, supported this, adding, "Fiscal responsibility is always there."

Nashville and Lexington were in financial crisis for similar reasons. A lack of executive financial management and information sharing had resulted in a lack of staff initiated service reduction proposals to maintain budget and boards were so uninformed they did not understand the miserable financial situation. In Lexington, services funded

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years before under specialized grants had eligibility expire with no provisions to cut service without replacement funding. The same issue evolved in Nashville as either zero-growth or decreased general fund contributions had MTA trying to deliver equal service levels with less money and growing costs. Getting both systems back on budget through difficult service reduction, wise spending, steady funding and budget management was critical to system turnaround.

It is arguable the new GMs in Nashville and Lexington entered their positions due to prior financial crisis where no executive could succeed; however, financial struggles have been part of transit history from the 1950s forward. The movement from private to public ownership of mass transit was due to lack of sustainability due to markets and has shaped the industry since. Environments faced by past executives in Nashville and Lexington emerged in the 1980s when federal operating assistance for transit was reduced and systems made constant service cuts to stay on budget. CARTA is a key example of this problem and Tom Dugan, just after becoming GM in 1980, entered an era when the surplus of financial assistance ended. After years of contributing little or nothing to transit, cities had to allocate money to keep buses moving.

When federal funding changed and required cities to fund massive local budget increases, Chattanooga's political leaders did not offer requisite political or financial support and a third of CARTA services were pulled off the streets between 1980 and 1985. Meanwhile the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) reduced programs around the Southeast hurting systems like CARTA with when regular TVA riders (TVA had actively supported transit use for employees) dwindled to virtually nothing. In this environment, focus was constantly on budgets, shortfalls and deciding what to eliminate next. More

recently, MATA has experienced similar problems when the City of Memphis offered

three consecutive years of zero-increase budgets forcing route frequency reductions,

shortened and restructured routes and a series of fare increases to piece together budgets

against growing costs.

In all five executive interviews, budget management was identified as the most

essential function of the job. In times of fiscal crisis, cost containment was identified as

the most critical factor, as is budget management and staffing expertise. The challenge

for executives is containing spending within the confines of revenue streams—user fares,

state and federal grants funds, private partnerships and local allocations. Executives must

budget and maintain awareness of the financial picture of the organization at every level

while relying on staff to manage the more than $120 million in combined operating and

capital budgets of the systems in this study. Budget formulation is a management

function and represents an allocation of attention and resources. Support staff and senior

managers must carefully follow financial directives and maintain spending discretion

because unexpected, unexplained or unmanaged budgets are career killers within public

transportation.

Executive Perspective on Formal Board Responsibility

In decision-making and influence regarding budgeting, finance and capital

projects executives described a situation of high-level board involvement with surface-

level board influence—at least nowhere near the level of financial power and influence

expected from high-level policy boards. As each executive outlined the budget

development process and factors contributing to budget outcomes, several salient issues

were evident. First, the budget is formulated to match general organizational directions

and boards make decisions to expend these amounts *after* the budget is formally funded.

Second, public transportation is heavily reliant on local general fund contributions

for operating assistance with those amounts coming from parent governments. Boards

typically approve staff-created budgets for presentation to the mayor and council who

decide what to fund or reject. Early board input comes when executives lay out the

"large baskets of money" for use (operating vs. capital vs. limited grants) and how much

is allocated for service expansion or system improvement. The board is approving the

concept of change but it is parent government approval of funds that moves money up or

down. Board involvement is after the fact; basically it tends to rubberstamp the parent

government's decision. Once funding is established the GM presents the line item budget

and the full financial picture.

Third, fares are definitely seen by executives as a powerful tool, especially in the

wake of nationwide fare increases spurred by fuel costs. In Memphis it can be volatile as

evidenced by Memphis city council's decision to strip fare policy from the MATA board

a decade ago out of distrust for the former general manager and board. Since restored at

MATA for political and trust reasons, a study-wide desire exists to keep costs low for

users. Memphis was the only system to actually raise its fares in the last ten years until

the increased in fuel costs of 2005 forced the change across Tennessee. In Jackson, the

fare increase passed in March 2006 was the first in seventeen years. Similar time frames

existed for both Nashville and Chattanooga. Boards are very limited in their ability to

influence budgets in meaningful ways and their ultimate weapon to raise revenue through

user fees is financially and politically unpalatable.

What is described above is a very board-involved process of meetings, explanations, pre-process approvals, line item adjustments and final budget approval; however, it is clear this is a staff and parent government process where the board has limited influence. Where boards yield the most potential influence is in financial management and capital planning. Financial management influence comes through regular oversight of, and working closely with, the executive and staff to monitor revenue and expenditures as forecasted in the final budget document.

All five executives spoke of high levels of involvement from board members in several areas. First, each authority has a financial report from the executive or staff to reviews revenues and expenses in a variety of sub-accounts by service type both monthly and year-to-date. This allows boards to review issues and ask questions. Second, board members take advantage of this opportunity to question financial performance and in most cases effective executive management of the budget limits concerns, although issues such as rising fuel prices and fringe benefit costs are difficult to forecast and make staying on-budget difficult. Executives have become extremely proactive in reforecasting revenues and expenditures and in explaining unbalanced accounts, such as insurance premiums due at the start of the year and place the budget out of balance until year end. Reforecast fuel budgets prompted a mix of service reductions and fare increases throughout the sample.

Third, boards are creative, proactive and responsive in keeping the system on budget. Memphis was poised for a board-recommended fare increase to offset fuel expenses; however, the matter was tabled in hopes that markets would shift or that opportunities would allow savings in other areas. In Jackson, the board approved an

unbalanced budget allowing the board and executive to review financial performance month-to-month rather than make service cuts to night services right away. Jackson's small size makes it difficult to forecast fuel and fringe benefits and the carefully monitored wait-and-see approach has been successful for MATA and JTA.

Fourth, board responsibility and policy for approving contracts and purchases creates constant awareness and involvement in finance. All systems require board approval of purchases exceeding a range of $10,000 in Jackson to $100,000 in Nashville—scaled to match the financial needs of the system. At CARTA, the board treasurer reviews all purchases over $2,000 including fuel, parts and equipment; at JTA two-signer checks require staff and board member signatures for authorization. In both cases there is a high level of board member involvement in routine purchasing for the authority. A similar process occurs at MTA and MATA with authorities relying on committee structures to closely review financial processes, discretionary purchases and budget performance. The committees usually involve the board chair or vice chair and board members with strong financial backgrounds for more hands-on involvement and a greater level of comfort among board colleagues.

Surprisingly, all GMs saw the spending limits of executives as appropriate for the respective systems' size and scope. Two executives explained that a good balance allows the board voice, input and control on large purchases but permits executives to be reactive to system needs and quickly solve problems. Detailed staff reports, explanation and issue framing are saved for the larger and more important (usually expensive) items—although due diligence is still applied. The benefit of executive spending

discretion is more a function of effective use of staff and board resources and the need for expedited action on key issues.

The final area of opportunity for strong formal board involvement and control is the capital planning and funding process. Each transit authority receives a formula grant from the federal government combined with allocations from earmarked statewide discretionary capital grants. These funds, combined with congressional earmarks and federal programs provide the bulk of capital planning and purchases. The boards approve grant applications, the receipt of funds and approve the annual program of projects—a clear opportunity to shape organizational approach to on street service through equipment purchases and the desired level of investment in capital resources.

The collective executive perspective is that outside of these areas boards have limited opportunity to provide formal high-level policy and organizational direction. When posed with the question of whether the board should have increased formal fiscal authority over routine budget and spending issues, the GM answers were split. Three answered "no" because they felt the present balance of power and authority between the board and executive was established, functional and beneficial for boards and executives. These GMs feel strong, effective, executive financial management eliminates need for increased board involvement in budgetary and spending issues and as one executive succinctly put it, "If the GM was blowing the budget, that's one thing: but I haven't had that problem." The key is whether the board has the information to make effective decisions and a comfort level with executive management.

The GMs suggesting greater board power in budget and spending offered two distinctly different reasons for increased involvement. One argued the board should have

more involvement because if impropriety were to occur they wouldn't be in position to identify it. Board members have become less detailed in the financial questions they raise, with exception of a few who require more information on certain issues. The emphasis is that all board members should have this attention to detail instead of relying almost exclusively on after-the-fact audits and staff driven financial reports. The second executive perspective on increased board power is the GM's job would become easier because GMs have two masters that can be significant obstacles: the mayor/council and then the board. The GM "can't talk about the issues the way they need to be addressed and ends up tiptoeing around the issues . . . instead of taking them head-on." A board with strong financial authority would have the capability to get more involved in funding issues and relieve the pressure of finding funding. The GM would be able to focus more on running the system instead of chasing money. At the same time this executive concedes that more power for the board could become problematic because the city and the board think differently on high-level and low-level issues. It is hard enough for the GM; an increased level of involvement and power could create and even greater problem, as he or she would be required to tiptoe through two very different and very powerful groups while trying to appease both.

Where executives are most interested in seeing growth in financial power among boards comes in developing funding and revenue for public transportation. In Tennessee, legal issues prevent authorities from placing referendums on the ballot, which is a hindrance when local political forces have no desire to move a referendum forward. Powers of eminent domain and revenue bonds are available in some authorities but are rarely used because they raise political and financial concerns. Most authorities are

structured such that the system has no ability to develop funding and the ultimate power

lies in the hands of funding entities.

Executive Perspective on Informal Board Responsibility

While formal board power is essential to understanding board functioning, this

research is focused on relationships between boards and executives and the most

important element is the informal responsibility boards have as a policy and mission-

oriented force. These unwritten responsibilities help to support the authority and

executive in a number of key areas and augment the formal powers described in the

previous section regarding budgeting, financial management, capital planning and service

development. First, all five executives discussed the value of board support during key

points and processes. High-level policy boards may be responsible for making decisions

but influencing decisions is equally critical. When the executive presents the budget to

the council and mayor—with the mayor's appointees sitting behind the executive—the

solidarity of the board is very visible and valuable to the executive and system. This

informal but clear measure of support bolsters the organization in the eyes of political

decision makers. As budgets and needs increase, the board's role of going before council

and talking about organizational direction becomes more significant. CARTA's

Executive Director, Tom Dugan explains, "When the board speaks, people listen . . . on

any issue they can touch part of the community because somebody on that board has

connections." Paul Ballard, MTA's CEO echoed, "When each board member is a leader

and well respected in the community, the respect they are given is extended to the MTA."

Second, boards provide moral, technical and leadership support to the

organization through pre-board meeting work sessions and committee meetings. These

are functions established outside of organizational charters and bylaws yet most authorities using some form of this process argue this is where real work gets done. Committee members can develop heightened levels of expertise and knowledge in more-narrowed subject areas that allow for better discussion of issues and eventually better decisions. Committees allow potentially problematic issues to be worked out through discussion, explanation and possible modification of recommendations. This process can increase confidence and comfort levels among other board members who lack understanding of complex committee issues while helping prepare and focus members for the formal meeting—specifics without the rhetoric. This is particularly necessary in more high-profile areas such as approval of unique contracts, major facility construction or issues regarding labor contracts with collective bargaining units.

CARTA's downtown committee met weekly for four years during the development of the garages and was involved in virtually every aspect of the project. They were engaged in the project and the finished product was owned by the board as much as the organization. In Nashville, the committee meetings are scheduled back-to-back at MTA offices and board members often show for the first, stay for the last and participate throughout. The committee meetings become mini-board meetings. This successful format has been adjusted in Lexington where committees were abandoned in favor of work sessions. Work sessions are designed for full board attendance and participation so the full membership can consider recommendations and discuss concerns or questions beyond a few committee members. LexTran board meetings are televised, which has a more chilling effect on the formal meetings and work sessions have become the center of more candid, direct and productive discussion.

Committee meetings also allow board members interact with department heads and staff. This professional senior staff/board interaction focused on policy and oversight allows board understanding of administrative and managerial decision-making processes while approaching questions at a more precise and technical level outside the normal precepts of formal meetings. It helps to build trust and perspective at both board and staff levels while improving report and information quality with a mix of positive feedback and valuable questions.

Finally, authority boards are sounding boards in a number of ways. First, outside inquiries and questions aimed at the executive from high-level local leaders and officials during public hearings, meetings or surprise telephone calls may have a political tilt or hint toward a separate agenda. Executives contact their boards for insight into motives, as board members may have stronger understanding of actions and perspective within their respective circles. This is also helpful in terms of institutional history and political decisions. New executives lack the experience to understand the color or texture of certain events while long-tenured executives might be aware of undercurrents within outside organizations or communities. Board input and insights provide food for thought and can result in change. Sometimes the board is a safety check to ensure FTA, state DOT or local regulations are followed. Other times they offer perspectives on new programs because not everything is about routes and riders. Involvement with marketing, Chambers of Commerce and relationships with central business districts are important to modern transportation executives.

Individual Members vs. Collective Boards

An interesting aspect of board power and influence, both within and outside the authority, was the substantial value executives place on board members as individuals as opposed to collective bodies. An experienced transit executive observed, "Boards are made up of people. Some are egotistical, strong, weak, whatever." What is significant about this statement is recognition that not all boards and board members are the same and not all boards and members can be high functioning. This provides insight that individuals have particular strengths and abilities of which an executive can take advantage.

First, board members are typically appointed because they bring specialized information or knowledge to the table. In terms of professions, board members that are attorneys, architects and real estate developers are extremely helpful in the web of legal issues and constructions projects. They advise and inform on key high-level issues through professional expertise but through the lens of the authority's interest. Day-to-day business owners, corporate managers, and financial experts have a keen appreciation for the challenge of delivering services on a daily basis and with an awareness of the complexity of managing large scale operations. Labor leaders provide insights and perspectives on labor-management issues while board members working in civil rights and equal opportunity areas engender a higher awareness and sensitivity to the balance between equality and efficiency in practice and policy. Others offer unique perspectives and are in tune with critical elements of the community, such as the disability or social services community. Board members with disabilities or those working with persons with disabilities can provide operational and policy perspectives and feedback on issues

limited to distinct populations. Typically these are lower-level policy areas but these board members offer insights into what a user might experience; however, it is tempered with the understanding of board and system goals and allows a more informed and global understanding of issues.

Second, board members offer individual strengths that emerge over time. A board member's willingness to commit large amounts of time or constantly open doors to political leaders is difficult to predict, expect or maintain. Yet, effort and time commitment is a very tangible, rare and valuable quality that executives have gushed over when available. New initiatives such as board benchmarking and peer-review studies are very involved processes that require a willingness to become involved in the internal and external board functions. New campaigns for services, funding and projects require direct communication with local leaders, neighborhoods, riders and non-riders through large numbers of meetings, public hearings, community and town hall sessions. All of this helps connect the system with the community and members can bring the executive and system before unique groups to bridge seemingly impassable gaps.

Finally, board members have a certain level of clout and strength within their individual communities and among local leadership. Many have close ties to their appointer—the mayor. For example, in Memphis the mayor is the former Superintendent of Schools and four of the seven board members are retired school district employees with close connections to Mayor Harrington. This is common with many of the authorities in this study. Board members usually are friends of mayors and council members. They typically are high-level business officials or long-standing members of the community that are known for a willingness to serve their city on boards.   These

relationships create continuity, especially among long-term board members who develop

long-term relationships with less controversy and change. A *good* board member gets to

stay—although what constitutes *good* varies from place to place.

Board members with established high-level networks create access and soften the

blow of financial issues by getting out front of the organization and talking with the right

people. Particularly strong and politically connected board members can get answers in

minutes with a telephone call that a GM could not get in a week. Projects and initiatives

that can die on their feet can be kept alive or nursed along in politically dangerous

scenarios by saying things that would send an executive looking for his or her next job.

Vital to understanding the member-as-power aspect of the board is recognizing

that individual board members are effective in their own way. A board member with a

strong labor union background is most effective when talking with council members

sympathetic to union issues or with other local labor leaders that may try and apply

pressure. This same person may not be very effective among power brokers within the

business, governmental or educational institutions. It is often the effective management

and utilization of these individual resources and assets that define the level of influence

the board can have as individuals or as a collective body.

Relativity of Political Power

While executives identified the value and importance of strong individual

influence and power among their board members, this was lessened when executives

were asked directly about the influence of the board on the political landscape. In one

instance, a GM indicated the board was politically weak. In most instances the board

members have the ability but so does a well-placed executive, which limits the tangible

levels of influence. Opportunity for influence in the political landscape is limited by the nature of the board itself. The earlier discussion of board power limitations, due to authority's financial restrictions, creates an environment where the occasion for direct, high-level political influence is rare if it exists at all.

Two other executives noted that mayoral appointees had the ear of the mayor but lack influence or acknowledgement in the city's legislative body. More often than not, council-related issues from the budget, political undercurrents or community concerns sprout from these sources—not the mayor's office. Executives displayed a clear understanding of influence from members and close relationships among power-players; however, there was a sense this handful becomes diluted when the players are the same. Another issue is that influence is often limited to a narrow-scope of low-level players. Members conscious of low-income or social service needs may not exercise influence outside their respective profession or community and generally are speaking to and for a disenfranchised base. They lack upward influence, extremely important in a policy board.

An executive with significant experience warned that the desire for a strong board is potentially dangerous. An excessive number of politically influential board members quickly become problematic. Differing board members with strong support can divide political decision makers or force directions the executive and board majority simply do not wish to take but the political landscape may dictate.

An important aspect identified by GMs was the boards' lack of influence and political prowess within the local landscape as not entirely a creature of the board members' personal or political characteristics but rather board structure. Two executives

identified the biggest obstacle to power and influence, and eventually board performance at its highest level, as the mayoral appointment aspect of the membership. One suggested the board should be elected, as elected officials carry far more weight and would elevate authority issues while the other suggested appointments should come from elected officials by jurisdiction, placing greater influence throughout the city landscape instead of within a single person. Another simply identified the best opportunity for more board influence is moving up a few layers on the socio-economic scale with real estate developers or business owners and executives, adding, "Money is a big influence and I don't have it and no one on the board has it either. In my experience, money people have the ability to get people to listen."

The complexity of transit operations and related issues is another significant obstacle. The concern for board member ability to independently articulate issues and problems was identified by two GMs as extremely difficult because it requires a great deal of education by the executive on the relevant issues. This is very time consuming for members and executives. Along the same lines, board members are limited in their awareness of city activity, which has a very similar effect when the board is not in tune with trends and opportunities available for the authority. Once again, responsibility for educating the board and time involvement comes back to the executive.

This leads to the other most common obstacle identified by executives in establishing the highest performing board possible—time commitment. In the case of volunteer boards, members must balance personal and professional obligations and cannot dedicate necessary time to attend mayoral, council, public and committee meetings, additional workshops and time with the executive and management team, all

necessary to be fully informed of issues and expected roles. When considering the combination of limited political prowess caused by individual, collective and structural limitations, most executives acquiesce their boards are doing the best they can and that it would be difficult to ask much more. The most successful and influential members were generally the most involved but there is an expiration date on that energy and commitment and it is very difficult to maintain both consistency and continuity of the message.

Representation & Individual Agenda

While the public authority structure is designed to insulate the execution of public service delivery from political influence, boards are inevitably political in appointment. This is most evident in discussion of board representation. Executives were asked whether they thought the board represented a good cross-section of their city and almost all answered with some version of "somewhat." Executives noted: the city and outlying areas were represented when possible; boards generally included a solid mix of professional, business, racial and gender diversity—a few lacked strong female or minority presence; and there is a lack of low-income representation although low-income riders comprise a strong rider population. The overall theme from executives was their respective boards represented the community in the best way a public authority board can by representing issues but with the mayor's appointment and council approval. The diversity, cross-sectional representation or lack thereof is not accidental but reflects the political values and preferences of the mayor. Ultimately it is a political decision of whether the goal is representation of policy issues or people.

This led to a discussion of whether boards should be representative of the population and executives unanimously agreed they should and for generally similar reasons. First, members are access points for riders—more access than what is available at a board meeting or at the transit offices and if the board member is representative a population then there an increased level of comfort for the customer. Second, the board is there to protect and represent the needs of the people they serve and provide feedback to management on what the authority is doing for its customers. Third, a representative board lends more credence to the organization and its decisions. If there is not representation, there can be a perception of disconnect between the authority, its decisions and the community. A representative board indicates all aspects of the organization and its riders are considered at decision time through board representation. This was mentioned by several executives through existing or desired inclusion of persons with disabilities and strong minority representation.

Generally mayors just call and ask if there are issues with a new member or make the appointment without input, already aware of whether to keep the same kinds of people and ideas or make change. There is actually little board turnover with most members leaving due to term limits or personal reasons such as health or business commitments. Most executives had experienced turnover of only one or two board members in the last three years, creating a very stable environment. Executives saw no real difference between board members inherited, recruited or appointed without input but with one difference—one executive noted that recruited board members have a tendency to be a bit more active for the organization.

As interviews unfolded, executives made constant references to a mix of issues and how they are influenced and shaped by the preferences and agendas of individual members, connecting almost every board member to an issue or idea they represent. The executives agreed these individual preferences were brought to the table on a generally consistent basis in issues related directly to personal experiences or circumstances, ideas or concern germinating from professions or for political attention or gain. Executives identified board member interest in a number of areas: services for transit-dependent populations, especially, low-income, disability and the elderly; professional experience and expertise in areas such as planning, management or transportation; and treatment and of employees from a hiring or labor/collective bargaining perspective.

Decision-making & Conflict

Executives discussed board member interests and sensitivity to certain issues and connected this directly to members' decision-making. Instances where the board member represents a community or issue area, preferences transform into agendas and significantly impact board-related discussion and decisions. Decisions on service changes and reductions are examined through impact on certain populations in which nearly every board member is interested, such as: those with disabilities or low-incomes; which neighborhoods or types of riders should be protected; and impact on the workforce due to layoffs. There was no significant emphasis on the long-term solvency of the system or what opportunities existing to create revenue to offset impending service cuts.

Even with the obvious opportunity to raise revenue through a fare increase, board members were extremely reluctant to make this choice. Even though most transit systems had not raised fares in more than ten years there was a feeling that a fare increase

would impose an undue burden on certain protected groups such as persons with disabilities, the elderly and low-income riders, especially the working poor. The board in Chattanooga was so reluctant to make this decision that at a CARTA board meeting passengers actually showed up to press the board for a fare increase instead of reducing service. They would rather pay more money than compromise the system—it actually took the riders to force a change in policy perspective die to the strong feeling a one-way bus ride of more than $1.00 was detrimental to certain populations.

Every board in this study included board members with this type of interest and nearly every board member has an interest pertaining to the purpose of the authority they serve. In almost every instance, the individual agendas that shape decisions create conflict with general manager goals, whether from past or present board members. First, executives described board member pressure to change hiring practices because of personal agendas and not the expected example of a member asking a GM to specially look at a particular job application. In most cases the pressure is strong but not forceful because ethics and formal hiring processes are strong deterrents from becoming more than part of casual conversation.

A second instance where low-level agendas emerge is in service-related decisions. Board members apply regular pressure to add or change services, spurring suggestions and even require change because of a new mall or development. Pressure from developers, or the belief that service adjustments will produce new jobs and added riders, has forced actual route or service changes. Sometimes this is to the detriment of the system and its riders. In one instance, a developer wanted "those people" away from his new building and was trying to move a bus stop that was very important and popular with

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riders—with the full support of a board member. Other instances are less specific and are more related to how changes will affect certain groups. Board members have voted down changes that would open services to larger populations, such as new apartment complexes or larger sections of existing neighborhoods because the route would no longer serve a particular neighborhood or because a handful of people opposing the change showed up for the meeting.

The third type of low-level agenda conflict, also tied to on street services but far more innocuous is nit-picking details of recommendations brought before the board. Most often this occurs when the board member has specific knowledge or expertise in the subject matter such as a procurement recommendation. New technology, such as on-bus cameras may be picked apart by a board member with an engineering background and force an unnecessary delay of the vote until staff investigation of issues and changes to specifications occur. Other times questions are obviously related to the person's interest such as, "Will the new bus have a wheelchair lift?" or "Will it still serve the job center?" Most often this does not actually impact the vote because the staff has made the recommendation in consideration of board preferences. Other times the board member's level of expertise and knowledge is limited and lacks the full context of issues involved; however, it detracts from discussion and implies a level of incompetence of the executive and staff.

Strengths, Weakness and Obstacles to Board Effectiveness

All five executives were asked whether their board has helped or hurt the accomplishment of goals and objectives. Without fail the executives said the board had helped them, particularly in instances when the board understands and adheres to the

policy roles and responsibilities of performance monitoring and oversight and recognizes the distinct role of the executive in handling management-related functions. During the research, executives discussed and described the most and least effective board members and what caused them fall into those areas. Political prowess and savvy was rated as extremely important. The ability to reach into certain parts of the community and establish support for the authority among local leaders and on key initiatives also was very important. Least effective members were those lacking the high-level connections and the ability to deliver political influence when really needed.

Effective members provide expertise with sensible advice and prudent questions at appropriate times. Board members who go along with others are ineffective because they do not contribute effectively to the process or provide guidance. They do not detract or cause problems but become non-factors in system direction. While high-level policy connections and influence are important, well-connected board members who do not attend board functions or prepare for meetings are ineffective. Committee and board meetings lack quorums and action can be delayed. When members show, executives must rehash issues and the member is constantly behind, unaware of what was asked and answered or lacks complete understanding of what is happening or where the organization is headed.

The most effective members meet their board obligations and maintain strong awareness of local and national trends. Some members are not well connected but their awareness and willingness to get involved in community projects and understand issues make them as effective as the most powerful, but constantly absent, board member due to an ability to make well informed decisions. The level of knowledge and expertise

required in public transportation is surprising to most outsiders and board members willing to invest time to learn the complex issues and expand knowledge over time are very helpful to the authority.

Success of the Board-Executive Relationship

Although all the executives identified various strengths, weaknesses, obstacles, agendas, conflicts, opportunities for failure and outright problems with board members, nevertheless, all five GMs offered very positive comments about their boards and board members. Each felt they had an effective board and had developed strong, positive relationships with their members. All five board members were asked, "How would you describe your relationship with the board?" Of the answers, all were described as good or excellent. When asked if the board was supportive of the job they were doing, all five answered "yes". All five answered "yes" when asked their opinion on whether the board thought they were an effective general manager of the transit system. On three critical questions of the board-executive relationships, the level of board support for the executive and the board's assessment of executive performance, all executives felt strongly the board was behind them.

Central to the discussion of positive relationships and strong support were two key issues—trust and information. Trust was the most important theme for the executives. For one, the board-executive relationship was, "Very good, tight and trusting because I work hard and I respect them . . . . I make sure they are involved and I don't take them for granted. . . . There's a certain amount of friendliness, openness, safety and trust." Trust is not easily developed but once established it allows the executive and

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board to expand their interaction and learn to disagree without harming the relationship.

A seasoned executive explained:

> We have developed some knowledge and understanding of the business and I have always been able to talk and explain issues because I have established a trust. They can trust what I tell them. . . . We can agree or disagree but they trust what I tell them I believe and it is backed by my experience. . . . There are no secret or hidden agendas so I allow them in a sense to participate and because of this I don't feel the pressure to do this or do that. . . . I'm a good politician. I've been in the business a long time so I keep everyone involved and included so there is no backlash. There are no secrets—I do things the right way and I stand on that.

Another GM, whose board had been starved of trust by a predecessor, echoed trust as an essential element for positive relationships. While trust is the most important aspect of the board-executive relationship, trust is built on the quality of information and how it is shared. The previous executive made no effort to include the board in decisions and involved them only when required. When the board was involved, especially in financial matters, they were surprised by what they heard and learned as a result of poor planning and communication. Now, "there are no surprises. I tell them the truth and lay out the facts and issues." He explained further that when he was interviewing for the job that he had explained to the board that he would work with them to frame issues and implications. The board needs facts to make decisions and it works well because, "if I say 'these are the numbers because I've done all of the above', it equals trust."

At the same time, trust is built on more than facts; it is built on an individual effort to get to know the preferences and expectations of each board member. The key is building a personal relationship with each member to learn what he or she expects and to operate accordingly. It is the opportunity to create or rebuild a relationship caused by misunderstanding or disagreement. It is the opportunity to talk informally, outside the oft

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rigid confines of formal meetings and work sessions to communicate what is actually

going on, learn board member concerns and figure out what direction they are headed.

One executive describes a particularly difficult relationship with a board member that

seemed to disagree with and distrust the executive. The executive started meeting one-

on-one, once a month and allowed the member opportunity to ask questions in an

informal way—probe the issues, hear the other side of the story and try to poke holes in

the issues.

The more time spent with the board member, the more open and trusting the

relationship. Board projects such as transit centers, frequent involvement in key

committees with the executive or actions that require regular visits from a board member

such as signing checks and approving invoices creates one-on-one time where business is

handled but with a personal touch. It is this type of activity that most easily crafts and

shapes the neutral and even negative relationship. "I spend time with them on a regular

basis and I know what they are thinking," explained an executive, which helps when

developing recommendations for board review and possible approval. One says, "If I

think I won't have all the votes, I won't bring it to them. This isn't to say I've pulled

anything back either. I start early on by making them comfortable and by making sure

what I put together is something they'll be willing to support." Trust and relationships

are also built over time. In the case of Memphis and Chattanooga, there has been a very

high level of board and executive continuity over the past thirteen and twenty-five years,

respectively. As board members grow in knowledge, see the expertise of the executive

translate from advice into fact and see the effective management of personnel and

resources, GMs feel trust relationships will be built.

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT OF THE BOARD-EXECUTIVE RELATIONSHIP

Executives in public transportation authorities do more than just manage organizations that deliver transportation; they manage a public authority board in a highly complex political environment. Like all public managers, finances are the forefront of each and every decision on a daily basis. Limited funding streams dictate a cost containment approach to transportation while balancing the need to maintain services against the growing expenses of delivery. The past year's high and unbudgeted fuel costs forced executives to alter their budget management focus of managing expenses and revenues to a revenue development agenda that required greater levels of board awareness and action to keep the organization afloat.

Still, that was not the entire focus of public transportation authority boards because there is a limit to member ability for active involvement in financial management and high-level policy. Instead, board ability to be a support network for the organization, especially the executive, through public support, community outreach, technical guidance, and leadership was the most valuable element of board involvement for the authority. Within this construct were boards of extremely diverse backgrounds, composition, influence interests, values and opinions. For executives the success of balancing fiduciary and service needs of the authority was the ability to effectively manage relationships with individual and collective members and balance varying motivations against pressures existent within these environments.

Trust along with facts and information is not enough to develop strong, positive board relationships, either one-on-one or with the communal board. A key element is also the executive's approach to management through an inclusive, yet controlled level of

board and member involvement. As mentioned earlier, boards are sounding boards with expert advice; however, there is a limit. The board is looked at by the executive as an on-call sounding board, either for direct or indirect advice and counsel on pertinent issues. However, one GM asserts, "They are a sounding board but I run it. I want to be able to do it right, wrong or indifferent. When I'm wrong, they tell me how and I learn from it and it goes from there. But they can't tell me how to do it." Meanwhile, the manager and staff must remain approachable to the board. It is it through this openness that an executive can encourage participation and get their staff and board to push forward. Board and staff interaction was less common than expected, as executives are wont to wall the organization off from board incursion while controlling information. Highly effective managers allow and encourage interaction because a level of trust and understanding emerges between the board and the staff—assuming the executive had trust in his or her staff to properly work with the board members—cultivating bilateral cooperation.

Information is extremely important because a surprised board is an unhappy board, even when it is a management issue. Several executives agreed that it was critical to involve them in management responsibilities, one using whether they would be distressed to read about it in the paper as the informational litmus test. Avoiding surprising or embarrassing them is one issue but based upon the descriptions of board-executive relationships provided by executives, all board members want to be involved in executive management issues to some level or degree.   It is the matter of degree and how the executive manages the level of involvement preferred by the member. The selection and communication of these issues is the key. First, on some issues the board must be

kept informed, such as with major accidents, significant labor disputes and controversies

that could arise in the media and catch them off guard. In these instances it is working to

make sure the board member is never surprised or embarrassed.

Second, there are certain things that must be conveyed to certain board members

because each board member has an issue preference or expertise. An effective executive

exploits this expertise for two reasons: 1) it is beneficial to have the technical advice; and

2) no matter what a board member says, it is to the executive's benefit to include board

members in management issues that fall under the specialized interest areas of the

member. "If I know the member has a particular interest I call them out of courtesy and

for their expertise. . . . If they are active or an expert, I keep them in the loop so they

know what is going on." It is critical to do this because failure to ask a board member for

their advice in an area of expertise is an insult or sign of disrespect to the member.

Sometimes issues arise and the executive does not think about the board but later realizes

they need to reach out to a member or the chair. One explains, "I'll call them and say, 'I

need your advice'. Sometimes I need it but I don't want it." The key to effectively

managing this interest is containing the potential micromanagement by drawing the line

at *decisions* for managing the system. Information and advice is one thing but actual

involvement in decision-making is dangerous for the executive.

Third, GMs foster increased levels of involvement with board chairs. The board

chair seems to be the exception and as one GM deftly put it, "they run the show." The

chair will field questions from different sources and is the point person for the executive,

fellow board members, media outlets and elected officials—including the mayor.

Accordingly, the board chair must have increased knowledge and awareness with a feel

for the executive direction of the organization. This is to executive advantage since

chairs have increased levels of influence and control among fellow members, making the

chair's leadership and guidance of the board extremely valuable. If a board member

devolves into day-to-day issues, the chair can shut them down and explain it as a

management issue, saving the executive from unwanted and unnecessary incursions that

may hurt the relationship. They can diffuse irate customers at public forum, instill

confidence in the process and maintain a quick, efficient meeting that addresses board

business and not much else. An informed chair can expeditiously execute the agenda and

avoid devolution and micromanagement rampant in excessive and wandering discussion.

At the same time, some board members want to be involved in day-to-day

management issues and do not understand the role of a board member. They have an

opinion on anything and everything but lack the consistency and continuity from meeting

to meeting to turn the concern into a legitimate issue for discussion. This type of

discussion tends to devolve into micromanagement or the more harmless aspect of

sharing an idea. Usually these board members are not talking for the sake of ego or

posturing but displaying a level of skill or interest—they just happen to be board

members. Once again, this is where chairs and executives must display skill and tact to

shut down the discussion before it gets off track and detracts from process and business.

Others want to be part of the interviews, pick the fabric color for new bus seats, attend

the employee cookout or weigh in on the new lefts and rights when the new bus routing is

developed. These board members are often personally attached to the system and want to

make low-level decisions they can understand and apply their fingerprints to services.

But as explained through GMs, the advantage still lies with executives. Executives have tremendous resources at their disposal to keep this relationship strong and professional. Executives with management firms such as Professional Transit Management or First Transit have strong support organizations bringing support through board workshops, strategic planning and business sessions that set the course and tone of the board-executive interaction. Executives without firms can utilize management consultants, board retreats and workshops to achieve similar results. Issues involved in public transportation are difficult and complex—decisions need to be instant and learning curves are tall and wide. Board members understand and appreciate this and recognize the professionalism and experience of executives and staff to make good decisions for system benefit. Even when wishing for involvement most board members cannot get caught up in day-to-day issues because they have their own lives and careers and cannot invest the time and energy to effectively learn issues. That is why boards hire executives—to manage and implement board-developed policy.

If the executive does not understand the duality of roles of management and policy then tremendous opportunity for board incursion on managerial preferences and authority exists. If the organization is poorly managed, the occasional telephone call about a dirty shelter or a reckless driver becomes a call with expected follow through and specific results from the executive. Before long, the manager is answering to public board meeting inquiries of how the service department is organized, the amount of training provided to employees and the disciplinary structure for violations. It is a slippery slope and once the slide begins it is near impossible to hold on. But still, the advantage is with the GM. Successful executives learn to manage the board as they

would the organization—openly, honestly, with trust, respect, information and a focus on quality.

CONCLUSION

Executives of public transportation authorities are in a precarious position of managing a diverse set of board member interest and values while navigating complex waters of funding, political decision-making and hundreds of weekly issues such as class action union grievances to a failed bus engine fuel injector—and everything in between. A board comprised of high-level and low-level political players with a mix of high-level and low-level issues creates an environment where the board-executive relationship is difficult to maintain, yet these executives have been successful. Each system in the study has grown or maintained their status in an era of financial instability and pushed forward with new initiatives and services, meanwhile collecting support from their board in bits, pieces, and whole chunks at a time.

Authority boards are structurally and personally limited in ability to garner political and financial organizational support and wield a generally low-level of policy power within the organization, as measured by ability to influence financial and long-term planning. The primary value of boards for executives is individual member impact through expertise, political connections to elected officials, involvement with communities and community organizations and ability to bring a mix of these items to the table. Individual and collective investment of board time and energy is as much a political and board-executive strategy as an outright resource for furthering system

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success and a mechanism for building bilateral trust and support between the governance and administrative arms of the authority.

Of critical concern at this juncture is whether board members hold the same perspectives on the board-executive relationship as the general managers. How boards perceive their roles can vary greatly and the following chapter explores board insight on formal responsibilities, power and influence and the perceived, actual and preferred levels of involvement in governance and organizational management. Chapter Three laid the groundwork for executives' organizational understanding. Chapter Four builds on this foundation toward a complete framework of the board-executive relationship within the context of the modern public transportation authority.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND FINDINGS: BOARD PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITIES

INTRODUCTION

As Chapter Three reveals, public transportation authority executives are deeply

concerned with managing the organization with an eye toward developing and

maintaining trust relationships with the board. The trust relationship comes through a

process of transparent operations, promotion of informed decision-making and inclusion

of board expertise and experience in the formal and informal elements of responsibility.

This chapter continues the investigation and exploration of the board-executive

relationship through the eyes of public transportation authority board members and offers

their perspectives on the roles, responsibilities and effectiveness of both the board and

executive. The chapter follows the general themes established by executives, offing more

unique and divergent perspectives in consideration of: 1) board member backgrounds and

preparation; 2) board member responsibility and effectiveness, with a focus on formal

and informal responsibility; 3) issues of political power and influence along with

representation as a value; and 4) relationships with the executive and the factors

impacting those relationships.

BOARD MEMBER PERSPECTIVES ON THE BOARD-EXECUTIVE

RELATIONSHIP

Board Member Background and Experience

As expected, there was considerable variation in backgrounds of the thirty-one

board members participating in the research. Diversity, one of the central themes that emerged from this study in terms of age, race, professional background and experience, played out in several key areas. Despite the many paths members traveled before arriving on the public transportation authority board there was considerable consistency among backgrounds. First, almost all board members had prior experience on governing boards. Very few had previous experience on public authorities, elected positions or special commissions but a larger number had served on civic boards with public policy implications such as economic development, planning, councils on alcoholism or teenage pregnancy, voter involvement, and disability and elderly awareness. A large very number had significant board experience related to community-wide activism and organizations ranging from hospitals or to arts councils. Other experience involved special interest organizations such as professional associations, churches, schools, and neighborhood associations.

The board members have an extremely diverse set of employment backgrounds, including architecture, law, medical, finance, ministers, full-time volunteers, and private business owners. There was a large number with previous government or public employment with teachers, university professors and administrators, a firefighter, a police dispatcher and a social service executive director joining the ranks of public authority board members. A significant number had political experience as elected officials, staff for government agencies or organizations, partisan activity and political activism or instigation. A considerable number of board members were retired from their professions but continued to serve the community through board activity.

The vast majority had no prior experience in private or public transportation management or governance; however, the impetus to serve was tied to one of three main areas. First, board members served out of concern for community issues that arose from their backgrounds in areas such as collective bargaining or social services. Second, many had direct experience with transportation services or experience in large-scale service-delivery organizations. Third, they had direct connection with public transportation due to their profession or personal experiences. Despite the limited prior connection to transportation, most of the board members have since become well acquainted with the authority and its services. Only eight of the board members had three years experience or less of authority board service, with fourteen members having served a range of four to eight years on the board while another ten have served more than eight years. There has also been generally widespread involvement in board leadership among the members with fifteen members serving as the chair, vice chair or other board office.

Appointment, Focus and Agenda on the Public Transportation Authority Board

One of the strongest connections developing from the interviews was the emphasis board members placed on appointment to the board and the agenda they bring with them to their seat at the board table—despite little knowledge of public transportation or prior public authority experience. Past professional experience and involvement with local politics and leaders were linked with individual motivations for service, which included personal desire to improve transit service, general willingness to serve the community or the personal pride of being appointed by the mayor. Through these connections was how these board members represented parts of the city—aspects relevant to the transit systems or the community as a whole.

Diversity and consistency of board member backgrounds created a surprising level of consistency among members' willingness as well as their interest in serving on a transportation authority. There were a handful of members that responded to a community-wide call for volunteers or recruited themselves for the position. That interest was strongly related to community concerns and members were selected because of their community roles, for example involvement with neighborhoods and communities or those with specialized professional expertise.

The early focus for most of these self-recruited members was learning about public transportation and service delivery while trying to develop new programs and ideas. In terms of agenda these members felt there was a gap in transportation services or ineffective transit management and hoped to bring attention to more broad-based community transportation services or system failures. These members also identified themselves as present or past users of public transportation, at either that system or another, creating a stronger connection between the member and on street service. Some were focused on helping make better decisions for on street services, such as which routes to improve or protect during service cuts.

There were occasional variations, such as a board member from Nashville MTA, once employed by at the MTA and previously the executive director of the Nashville Regional Transportation Authority. Self-recruitment was geared toward keeping a level of community and political involvement and when joining the board the focus and agenda was purely budgetary—establishing an understanding of the fiscal aspects of the system. Another board member described their appointment as a serendipitous. A mayor's staff member was recruiting another person when the preferred choice declined. The mayor's

staffer—perhaps in jest—asked the recruit's companion to serve instead. They accepted—also perhaps in jest—and was on the board of a public transportation authority six months later. This new member had no knowledge or experience of the system and until asked to serve had no idea the system had a board. She just brought a willingness to learn processes and try to look at things a different way and has since established national prominence for her contributions for public transportation authority board governance.

A significant number of board members were appointments sought by the mayor because of leadership in a specific community activity. These board members felt their connection to certain segments of the community, such as low-income neighborhoods, social services networks and civil rights issues, is why they were selected and obligated to bring those concerns and issues to the forefront. One such member wryly said, "I see myself as a constant, if not irritating presence to keep these concerns at the forefront." They explained the importance of maintaining their community connection because they are conduits between the authority and their community. Others have more specialized communities, such as active involvement in disability issues or past involvement in labor unions and living-wage campaigns and have perspectives and opinions with an expectation to guide the executive and impact policy. A member from Chattanooga understands her appointment was likely based on being a strong, outspoken, African-American female with extensive board experience and a willingness to serve.

Like those who recruited themselves, these members had a perception of past failures or great opportunities to fill transportation gaps to meet the needs of certain communities and became—and remain—involved to ensure these communities are served. For one person, the focus when joining the board was to enhance transportation

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for persons with disabilities by improving on street service. For others it was to find

ways to provide more service to minimum wage workers and the economically

disadvantaged.

Other board members were representative of an important segment of the city in

the areas of government, industry, education or business expertise. In Memphis, one

board member was recruited through his management position at FedEx; in Chattanooga,

it was the Dupont Chemical Plant; in Nashville a past CBID transportation committee

chair was appointed, as was an attorney from Vanderbilt University. Often these board

members are recruited for their experience in broad-based industry or management and

have more global perspectives on transportation, governance and management. Expertise

has been identified as important, especially in finance when systems had extreme

financial problems such as Lexington and Nashville. In Chattanooga, emphasis has been

on construction projects and now the board includes an architect and attorney and at one

time a real estate developer. There was also a strong contingent of board members who

have direct connection to political officials, especially in Memphis where the mayor is

the past school superintendent. Four of seven board members have ties to the Memphis

education system and three held administrative posts under the mayor when he was

superintendent. In other cities, friendship with a council member has prompted

nomination.

Typically there is no specific agenda held by appointees at the time of

appointment. Rather, then tend to be interested in the totality of the organizational

machine—not the service or organization itself. Board members of this ilk saw

themselves as manager/leaders that have an edge because of their ability to plan and

execute needs. Despite their "get things done" acumen, these members also have a genuine respect for their responsibility to give back to the community. They identified no agenda or population to serve but rather are helping the community through a willingness to participate in the community and the process.

Board Member Perspective on Formal Board Responsibility

Board members, much like executives, identified a high value and level of awareness on board fiscal responsibility and involvement. They were also cognizant of the low-level service issues on which boards must decide, such as route and time changes. What was interesting was how board members answered the short, to the point question, "What are the duties and responsibilities of the board?" Most board members responded with a very nuts-and-bolts answer of making decisions on routes and services, specialized events, attending meetings and events such as banquets and roadeos (bus driving obstacle courses), voting on fares, approving purchases, reviewing reports and listening to customers. This generally reflected a recollection of board action items from recent meetings. The understanding was they were there to oversee operations.

A number of board members spoke in vague and board-based terms about the same general functions with hiring and direct oversight of the GM, setting policy for operation, balancing the budget and overseeing services. This description was slightly higher-level, understanding the reason for the decision not really speaking to organizational purpose or mission. Generally discussion was focused on board oversight of system operations in terms of budget, revenues and expenditures, ridership levels and minor changes to system operation.

A series of more advanced perspectives emerged from a smaller vanguard of board members heavily focused on the governance aspect of board responsibility. A large number of board members would say "policy-making" but the policy described was routine approval of low-level recommendations described above—absent of governance. When governance was discussed, "policy-making" took on an entirely different tone. The more governance-oriented answers included: abstaining from micromanaging executive authority; establishing operational and managerial accountability; communicating the value of public transportation; balancing the organization's financial needs vs. needs of riders; funding scenarios; recognition of appointee needs to serve mayoral interests; and setting fiduciary and strategic policy for the organization. As one such respondent explained, "Policies for use, such as fares, are the easy things. The hard part is the strategy. Is it about how much money you bring in or how many riders? Staff needs to guide the decisions but it's our ethical duty to make the decision." For one member, emphasis was on providing advice on and approval of where the GM is taking the organization with an obligation to know what the director is doing and offer input accordingly.

When pressed about specifics—the actual items presented to the board for vote—the answers followed a similar trend. Most members shifted into routine items and became more specific about the types of route changes, the limits of purchases and what the financial report included—more overall detail regarding low-level policy items. A wider array of items cropped up with the approval of union contracts, approval of policies such as drug and alcohol policies, contracts for auditors, vehicle insurance and the employee benefits package.

What was very different was the handful of board members who spoke globally about the limitations of funding streams, the impact on service and the need for political efficacy as played out through budgetary decisions. These are items disconnected entirely from the "yea" or "nay" approval process but coupled with the long-range stability of the system and services. Votes to approve capital funding may have included the flexing of political muscles with a congressman's office while route changes might include calming a negatively impacted community. Actions like this are tied to the actual vote but occur outside the board bylaws or formal meeting agenda. This discussion also occurred when members spoke of initiating policy instead of reacting to recommendations: ethics reviews and formal policy; route performance standards that require meeting performance measures or risk reduction or elimination; and standardization of procurement policy and multi-system purchasing to lower costs through multi-agency, bulk procurement.

When asked if there were any responsibilities where the board wished it had more power and influence the answer was almost always "no". Board members commonly felt either well informed by the executive with a comfortable level of power within their authority structure or they understood that needed change was not really possible, for example increasing funding streams. Follow-up questioning focused on whether areas existed that members felt the board should be included in system service but is presently excluded. A few answers quickly turned to "yes" and the reasons were of extreme variety. Concern was expressed about the hiring and retention of employees and that the starting wage was too low to attract new drivers. Another expressed the desire to be directly involved in the hiring of executive staff positions with review of resumes and

participation in interviews—even expressing the ability and desire to offer suggestions to staff members as they develop recommendations. There was also a desire to negotiate union and vendor contracts and interact between the union and management—although none specifically interested had any experience with contract negotiations. Also, the complaint emerged that the executive too often marches to the beat of the mayor's drum, not the board's, and that they should have greater influence over the actions of the executive.

In terms of fiscal involvement and influence, board members have a distinctly different view from executive regarding the board's actual level of influence. On the surface, board members spoke intelligently and effectively about limitations of board and executive power in financial and service realms. First, in terms of the budget process, board members perceive a very strong amount of budgetary control, as evidenced through their discussion of the GM's monthly financial report, the explanation of expenditures and revenues and the routine board approval of purchases. They perceive themselves as approving, setting and balancing the budget, raising revenue in times of financial shortfall and taking the executive to task during financial crisis. However, board members exhibit the opposite actual knowledge and authority, mirroring the executive analysis of board fiscal power and influence in the budget process—involvement but not influence.

First, a number of board members acknowledged a poor understanding of the budgetary process, how it is formulated, how grant funds and user fee revenues are calculated or how they are applied. A few board members identified strong board budgetary influence but more in-depth discussion revealed that board approval was post-mayor and council approval and usually included no change and a limited understanding

of line-item justifications and breakdowns. Their influence played out through suggestions such as reallocating funds for marketing or advertising—a few thousand from here to there. Nothing of real consequence in consideration of the systems' combined $120 million budget.

In terms of the monthly financial report review—the greatest opportunity for oversight—few board members admitted to understanding the detailed interpretation of financial reports and instead review them and vote instinctively with the expectation that presented information is correct. A number of board members explained their lack of budgetary and financial understanding as due to the complexity of the numbers and the political processes, instead following the lead of a few (hopefully) well-informed board members, the executive and staff. A short-tenured board member elucidated, "I really don't know where the money comes from because of grants and things like that." Another echoed the numbers are simply too huge and there is a lack of understanding of the funding mechanisms. One area where most board members developed a strong understanding is the effect of rising fuel costs on operating budgets. This is because almost all boards have had to decide whether to increase fares juxtaposed with decisions to keep or cut services and the impact on customers and employees.

Fuel prices have been on the authorities' formal and informal agendas for months as boards and executives waited out the end of the fiscal year. Once again, the board understood the impact but not the process. In the end, many of them took the shortfalls, the forecasts, recommendations and the revenue on faith—and all seem equally proud and satisfied with making the "hard decisions" whether or not they really understood the

data and implications. The fuel increase created a situation where the "conversations go on but is hasn't increased [real financial] discussion in any real measurable way."

Another item of financial responsibility board members took as a financial source of power was the approval contracts and purchases. However, a surprising number did not actually know the bylaws of the board and had no idea what contract spending or change order limits are for the board or executive. Some had no idea the spending limits increased. Some had no idea which kinds of contracts are authorized to come before them. Some did not know why they were or were not involved in union issues. Grant applications, for example, are a very common process but very few properly explained the capital planning and procurement process as opposed to the actual vote on the final contract—long after the bids have been specified, released, returned and scored with pricing and delivery negotiated. Only a few drew any connection between the capital process and how it shapes the future of the city's transportation network. A capital project was perceived as just that—a project that needs money, votes and completion. Once complete, it is checked off the list with no long-term understanding of operating costs, impact on organizational function or the possible drain on resources.

Overall board members have seen no real change in their financial power, especially at the formal level. Most boards have kept the same level of authority over the years with occasional minor adjustments. There was some attention to the financial power that comes from new funding, such as LexTran's referendum, as it provides more teeth to policy changes. At MTA the change in power has shifted away from "lots of little purchases" to big-picture items of where is the money coming from, where is it going and is it being spent wisely? A few board members felt their own power has

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increased because over time they have learned what to ask and are less reliant on the

board member who happens to be a certified public accountant.

Amusingly, neither the executive nor board thinks the board should have more

influence over the budget and spending issues but for opposite reasons. The general

manager does not want the board to have more power because it would impact executive

ability to make decisions and run the organization. They feel the present balance is good.

For a lot of board members, they already think they have total control and perceive that

executives do not have the financial power they actually hold. Board members equate

their late-stage budget approval and review of monthly financial reports with budget

control. Yet, they often admittedly lack the expertise and no real ability to understand

whether the work rules or the allocation of human resources (the most expensive line

item is driver's wages) is fiscally prudent. Meanwhile they assert they are not a

"rubberstamp" board. The board simply perceives far more power than they actually

have in budgeting and do not acknowledge their power and influence in key areas of

financial management and capital planning. Where boards wish they could exercise

influence in budget and spending is the union contracts for wages, overall employee

benefits and budgetary accountability.

The key to this willingness to assume all is well on budgetary matters is that

members believe all is well. When asked, "Do you think resources are being obtained

and spent the best way possible?" even board members that had limited support for the

executive, questioned the financial process, along with concerns for executive leadership

said, "yes." Most members simply believe the board is a good steward of public funds

and pointed out year after year, budget cut after budget cut, the system runs only on what

it takes to place quality service on the street. They rely on the board member that is a

CPA, trust the annual audit and believe good discussion and debate among follow board

members drives a well-run system.

The majority of board member attention, before and after discussion of board

financial powers and responsibilities, was focused on the low-level policy of routes,

schedules, customer complaints and an attempt to address the individual concerns they

brought to the board. For example, a number of members were concerned with the

convenience of shelter and bus stops locations, continuation of specific routes in

neighborhoods or at malls and job centers, especially in late evenings and on Sundays,

and the executive's response to customer complaints. Some board members had real

difficulty maintaining in-depth discussion of financial issues such as grant processes,

budget cycles, budget size, spending limits and revenue intake. A number completely

avoided in-depth discussion of financial procedures but could easily discuss recent route

changes, entrances and exits to shopping centers and specific customers input from the

public forum of a recent meeting.

A number of board members described initiatives and recommendations, often

low-level approaches to high-level policy implications. For example, after the 9/11

attacks a member suggested a board and staff committee on facility security. A board

initiative to have the executive oversee a revised plan and develop funding strategies to

secure potentially higher-risk targets is high-level policy. Recommending a committee,

which the board member was really excited about serving on, is low-level and exceeds

the board's legitimate purview. Another similar recommendation came from a board

member who attended a professional workshop with a new technology on display that

might work on buses. The board member returned and was soon pushing the idea of this

new technology that was helpful, easy to implement and generally inexpensive; however,

clearly a low-level initiative.

Board Member Perspective on Informal Board Responsibility

One of the important themes surfacing from the executive interviews was the

value of the formal board as an informal board. Oddly, only a smaller number of board

members really identified a clear expectation of informal board responsibility, especially

in the important areas of moral, technical and leadership support or the members as a

sounding board. The aspect of strong informal responsibility emerged primarily within

two specific areas. Past and present board chairs acknowledged a much greater level of

informal responsibility and involvement due to the leadership nature of the position.

Also, board members described a much greater level of informal involvement and

responsibility during high-profile events or issues.

Board chairs simply have more responsibility due to their position. Formally,

they must have the greatest level of understanding of by-laws and processes to properly

hold meetings and guide discussion while ensuring the business of the authority is

conducted effectively and efficiently. To do this, they must have an exceptionally high

level of awareness of organizational trends and issues. A past chair described their role

as more than just a chair, describing times where they spoke with the GM three or four

times a week and acted as a one-on-one sounding board for the day-to-day operational

issues, especially when the executive was new to the system. Staffing and financial

problems created tremendous obstacles for some systems; this chair felt the executive

needed someone to talk to about organizational obstacles and the chair's support was

critical. Even though the chair of this system has turned over, the new chair recognized

the same importance of being a sounding board and provides the executive an occasional

sanity check. Another past chair agreed that the relationship is different because of their

past chair experience, creating more context and history of issues. This same board

member has since recognized that since leaving the post their involvement has declined,

partially due to their personal efforts to curb curiosity on issues citing, "certain things

aren't in the board purview."

Even board members never serving as authority chair or vice-chair understood

this implicit responsibility. When discussing issues such as relationships with the

executive and the rest of the board, a LexTran board member explained, "She [Garcia

Crews] tries to give some priority to the chair because the chair has to deal with the day-

to-day issues and requires more prepping." A Nashville board member agreed, "I think

it's a different relationship with the board chair because of the position and 'different'

means a more intensified relationship with the chair and this tends to be true on all

boards."

The second area of executive support played out when board members described

their role in more unique and high profile events such as LexTran's referendum.

Numerous board members from Lexington spoke at length about their experience and

other members who worked side-by-side with Garcia-Crews. Attending countless public

meetings with elected officials and events with business and community groups the active

board members remained in constant contact to steer the public campaign and develop

strategy to best educate the population for the greatest voter impact. In Lexington, labor

union officials have gone to the mayor and council to complain about mistreatment of

union employees. Increased attention from the council and mayor have created a potentially explosive environment with local politicians making negative, pointed comments about the organization and questioning board and executive decisions, which should be based on organizational efficiency and effectiveness and free of political influence. This increased political meddling has also drawn negative media coverage with reporters making stories from vague comments and accusations but with little actual information.

The goal of the union and their political supporters, including a few council members, has been to apply pressure on the executive (directly and/or through the board) to get her to back down on her managerial approach. Executives trying to manage the day-to-day functions of the organization with political forces constantly looking over their shoulders makes for an extremely difficult situation. Executives and board members cannot manage and govern effectively with this type of political involvement, especially when it impacts not only decisions are made but also the outcomes. A board member who pointed to his labor experience as the sole reason for his board appointment, feels he has played some role in keeping this situation from exploding into a political battleground. With pressure on the mayor to get involved, this member has been able to talk with the mayor and provide understanding and context to the comments and claims offered by the union camp. In addition, he has placed himself as a political wedge between the mayor and the authority, "If she stays out I'll continue to serve. Otherwise I'll resign." This is a strong power move that could only be performed through a board member appointed to advise and improve existing poor labor relations but who strongly

believes that the involvement of outside forces undermines the collective bargaining spirit and process in this circumstance and at this juncture.

Poor labor relations recently emerged in Nashville, at the political level, as the authority continues to negotiate with the union for a new labor contract—negotiations that have dragged on since October 2005. Nashville MTA's CEO, Paul Ballard, was called before the Nashville Metro Council's Transportation committee to answer questions about the negotiations and some of the claims advanced by the union. The board membership attended the session with the executive to present an informed and prepared front. The board chair (and former Chief of Staff for Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander), opened the proceedings with a "state of the MTA," discussion on recent ridership increases and program success, funding challenges, the new commuter rail project and the transit center before attention was turned to Ballard. From the board and executive's perspective this was a very effective mechanism to help control what could have become a political inquisition. Instead of using the entire session to grill the CEO over a series of complaints the Metro Council committee first heard a statement from established and respected chair that emphasized organizational success.

This type of informal participation is critical for an executive, and not just for solidarity purposes. Many boards would see this as an executive's responsibility and would maintain distance; however, this type of situation—an authority executive called before a legislative body to account for his or her actions—is extremely toxic for executives. Usually, these types of settings are not fact-finding hearings but political power plays where there is no reasonable opportunity for the executive to exit the session unscathed, as minds are often already made up and no one is truly willing to listen. The

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board softens this harsh setting by presenting a unified group of respected individuals who lay out major accomplishments in areas of revenue, ridership, efficiency and effectiveness—items that offer texture to a politically charged environment. The board also has the ability to provide context to the executive after the fact because, "When you're in the chair [answering questions] you don't have the luxury of assessing what's really being asked." When an executive is fielding questions, developing answers that reveal enough but not too much and still limits opportunity for prying it becomes difficult to absorb exactly who is asking the questions, the individual agendas or how the council reacts to answers. A board member who is aware of the players and agendas and can observe the action allows them to more effectively understand the overall political setting. They can now make decisions as board and advise the executive more effectively because they understand the totality of what was an intense circumstance where executive attention was on the substance of the questions and answers, not the context.

In other instances, flexing political muscles on key issues was described as extremely important. In Nashville, the financial crisis was more than just poor funding. When mayoral administrations changed, the new finance director exhibited a lack of commitment to fund the 10% local match required for a recent bus purchase. The transit system had actually taken a business loan to meet their purchase contract obligations while waiting for the local match. The board went to the finance director and explained that if the funds were not released the buses would be parked and returned to the supplier. Only a board could leverage this type of pressure—an executive threat of this nature would lead directly to dismissal. Shortly after this meeting with the finance director funds were released and the loan paid off.

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Board members made frequent reference to the value of diverse board member perspectives and its contribution to discussion on issues and agenda items but discussion was usually framed within the context of the formal role of membership. Debate and suggestion for change on agenda items during formal meetings and questions on recommendations during committee and work sessions comprised the main areas where members felt they provided strong direction and guidance for the executive and organization. Board members felt they provided the most informal value to executives when they could offer expertise on selective issues. A LexTran member described how he assists the General Manager, Terri Garcia Crews. "She's quick to call me on a labor issue and I'll give advice. . . . [I have] a lot of experience with the [National Labor Relations Act] so with that background I'm very comfortable and she's good at coming to me." A different board member described similar circumstances but from a frustration standpoint. The frustration developed because she felt her expertise was not tapped during a personnel issue where an arbitrator overturned an employee's termination. "It was extremely frustrating because [the GM] never asked me what [he or she] should do." She described similar conversations with other board members who have said, "a lot of times if [the GM] had just asked me I'd have told [him or her]."

Political Power and Board Member Effectiveness

An important facet of public authorities, as described by executives, was the board's political efficacy manifested in the power and influence on the city's political landscape. Executives noted limited power and influence due to financial shackles imposed by the parent government and a narrow opportunity for influence outside the mayor. Also contributing, according to executives, was a lack of upward influence due to

their strongest ties with disenfranchised populations, lack of involvement with circles of power due to limited personal incomes, and the time involved to effectively communicate the technical mantra of the system outward. Board members generally agreed with executives' assessments that the overall board was relatively weak, identifying their power and influence as moderately strong or moderately weak. They noted a limit to the powers the board has in terms of formal powers granted by the parent government and controlled in the bylaws. Some felt their power was near non-existent because they lacked the ability influence the decisions of the city's political elites for the benefit of the authority. One board member said, "we're a blip," as he laughed in resigned frustration about the board's lack of political influence outside the authority.

On the first topic of limited power due to the authority structure, the reliance on federal, state and local funds places the authority on the receiving end of the political process. Even though elected officials tell board members and the executive that public transportation is important, it is generally lip service because they give what is needed and not much more. There was a strong sense that if the mayor and council are in favor of the organization then the basics will be there. Any system that has no dedicated funding through property or sales tax must annually beg for money and if the city declines, the system is in serious trouble. A CARTA board member observed, "The perception among political players is that we need them more than they need us. That's the way they see us so it limits our influence, if we have any."

This reality is a very limited board in terms of power but the greatest opportunity for influence within this circumstance is credibility. In Nashville, a sense of more political power is attributed to the improved credibility the system has established with

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the mayor and the community, which has translated into more money compared to when

MTA was "a non-entity."   Credibility only goes so far. For one MTA board member, it

would require different people to gain more influence. This limited political prowess and

influence was has been a concern in Lexington. Following the referendum and the

increased prominence of LexTran that came with it the decision was made to approach

the mayor with a desire for the next appointee to have strong business-community ties.

The addition of a highly influential, well-respected board member with a skill-set

beneficial to a growing authority is beginning to pay dividends for LexTran through

knowledge, expertise and stature. It was argued that more high-stature members are the

greatest source of influence for the authority because it provides the perception the

authority is more successful but a member warns big names could mean less effort. Big

names have more obligations—their companies, other boards—and could detract from

board functions as opposed to lesser names willing to invest the time and commitment to

make the authority operationally successful. A balance of these two concerns is critical.

The sentiment of board composition, power-players or non-power players, making the

single largest difference was a consistent theme. On power and influence vs.

performance, a well-tenured board member lamented, "I'm not aware the board has any

power. It really is about the people on the board—I don't think they think about the

system from one meeting to the next and if [the GM] decided to depend more on the

committees he'd fail because of the people."

Most members acknowledged board political limitations but identified individuals

carrying particular weight within respective communities. A JTA board member

explained several members are very influential by acting as a go between for the

community. "The community might have issues with the authority and board members help calm them down and explain things . . . the expense of fuel, the grant money, etc." Even when there were particularly strong and influential board members, such as at CARTA where the board includes a county commissioner, a fellow member said simply, "One person can't change things alone." There was significant recognition that boards wielded their power and influence at a grass-roots level. A CARTA board member enlightened further that leverage really comes into play in the communities where the board member is widely known and influential.

Even when influence can be exercised, it sometimes is not. A JTA board member identifying himself as one of a handful of more influential people within the city was asked, "How do you exercise your influence?" He said it has not come to that because the entire board is involved in other aspects of the community, therefore making better decisions to reflect the bigger picture. He added it has not been a transit vs. political circumstance but identified greater participation in other city functions and meetings as a key opportunity to enhance their overall influence. "We all have some level of influence because everybody has someone to talk to." A different JTA board member actually questioned the need for political influence. "I don't see where it needs to be influential. My personal belief is to stay away from politics if I can help it except for making sure people's needs are being met. Personally I'm in favor of that not being what we're about. I'm not a politician and I don't gravitate to that way of doing things."

In Memphis, the board has a large number of political ties but does not maximize the opportunity. This problem recently gained board awareness during the political battle over the planned light rail system. "We have seven big mouths that don't cost a dime and

we are a resource. We're in the process now or organizing to be present at key places," but the problem is the time commitment. It is very hard to push a volunteer board for high levels of involvement, especially on highly political issues. The willingness only goes so far. Time commitments came into play constantly from board members across the sample.

Most board members arguing a higher level of political influence focused on the opportunity for mayoral influence, echoing the executive's general criticism of limited board power beyond the mayor. "We have influence with the mayor primarily with some outreach to the council. But we have to be more aggressive to make sure they understand the importance and significant value of the service for the community." Establishing relationships and outreach beyond the confines of the public authority is extremely important because business and politics is about networking. Networking by participating in key events and processes gets past what a Memphis board member described as the "Who the hell are you?" factor. Knowing the mayor, and others by extension, breaks down the political barriers but term-limits and subsequent council and commission turnover make influence exceptionally difficult. Once again, the dedication and time commitment become real and meaningful obstacles to political influence—the appointment from the mayor becomes the one political constant.

Despite all of the negative assessments of board power, the recognition of the limitations of individual members and the inherent weaknesses of the boards' ability to deliver influence when really necessary, there was an overwhelming feeling that the respective boards were effective. A unanimous "yes" to the question, "Overall, do you think the board is effective?" is the clear and resounding indication. A few pointed to the

fact that the system was running generally smoothly and that the board was accomplishing goals and objectives set by comprehensive operations assessments or strategic plans. In these responses, attention was on task-orientation and effective board operation with a level of seriousness due to the public nature of both funding and service. These board members felt their strongest contribution as board was in meeting financial obligations while balancing the needs of the system against the needs of riders. A strong sense of "doing more with less" permeated these responses.

For other board members effectiveness came from the membership's diversity of and the varying perspectives that allowed for good debate, questions and thorough delving of issues, resulting in solid and balanced decisions to balance the needs of the organization with those of the community. The diversity was not always focused on outcomes for the diversity of riders—talents such as legal skills, labor relations, executive management experience and strong business acumen bring together a variety of talents to create meaningful discussion and spur creative solutions.

A common criticism of boards by members was the board's easy willingness to follow executive recommendations. Whether it was a lack of initiative, limited inquisitiveness or a paucity of information, these individuals felt their board did not challenge the GM's recommendations or staff reports. One board member felt the same way but explained it is not a factor of disagreement but that challenging proposals forces better evaluation of possible options prior to recommending board action. He felt that there was just too often a will of the majority—a desire not to stir things up or cause trouble because a single board member constantly challenging issues becomes a political oddball. Everyone goes along to get along. This sentiment was harshly endorsed by

another board member from a different system, "It's this whole Southern attitude. Avoid

confrontation at any cost, especially on a public board. We're a good will board and

that's the biggest obstacle to implementing change." A "go along"-type board member

deftly (and possibly accidentally) identified the quagmire and need for the challenge-

oriented oddball:

> Some might want more authority and more clout and I sense that there are
> one or two that are suspicious of things. I wonder why they're suspicious.
> They're very questioning and speak out on things but I don't know if
> that's good or bad. They might be some of our best board members. They
> ask the most questions with both praising and probing.

Overall, the single greatest obstacle to board effectiveness, at the group and

individual level is involvement and education. For some it is asking more questions,

learning the business of public transportation and becoming aware with national and

statewide trends. There was a need to better understand how changes in funding

regulations impact operations and capital budgets as well as procurement processes.

Boards wanted to better understand how systems deliver services, especially in

consideration of homeland security, advancing technology and judicial decisions on civil

rights through the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Representation

Representation emerged as one of the most important elements in understanding

board member opinions and perspectives. Unlike executives, who were asked whether

they thought the board represented a good cross-section of their city, the approach with

board members was to ask, "In your role as a board member, on whose behalf are you

acting?" and "Is there are particular group you feel you are speaking and voting for?"

General discussion led to questions of whether the board represented a good cross-section of the city and which population segments were not represented.

When discussing whether the system represented a good cross-section of the population, board members were extremely varied. Many said "yes" and answers drifted from either excellent representation or complete under-representation in very diverse areas of: professional backgrounds, board member prominence, inclusion of social services, business, industry, universities, race, gender, political parties, disability perspectives, retirees and geography. The fact that such diversity is not accidental was a common understanding. "[The board] is a good mix and not accidental. You have to work to get that" level of diversity. Diversity was identified as a concerted effort, explained one of CARTA's board members, and is good because it is more experiential and reflects community diversity, adding, "It's a quasi-political make-up and reflects a stronger understanding of needs." Ironically, one board member noted a clear representational gap despite the board having a person appointed almost solely because of their specific background—a sly criticism of that member's ability to truly represent the needs of a very important population.

On a consistent basis there were two groups identified as lacking representation on the various boards—Hispanics and transit riders, especially low-income, transit dependent riders. While some board members saw the benefit there was considerable question as to the efficacy of such representation, mirroring the concerns of executives. Reflecting on LexTran's referendum process, a board member who once believed riders needed stronger voice on the board really questions the value now. "I don't think they'd feel comfortable other than in terms of prestige. In terms of a contribution I don't think

there's much for them to add." Another reiterated, "How good is it to have an immigrant representative without English skills or who lacks the understanding of American government?"

At the same time, there was a unique discussion of whether boards are actually the best place for the specific communities needing voice such as persons with disabilities, immigrants and the working poor because you have to see more than one side of an issue. "When you're on the board you have a fiduciary responsibility, which makes advocacy much harder." The most unique voice on representation was from a Jackson member who singularly noted that upper income residents are not represented—they do not ride the service and do not understand the issues.

Board responses to the question—on whose behalf was the board member acting?—the board members generally fell into two groups, the citizens at large and the riders of the system. First, when discussing the community at large, board members were personally divided in their own role as needing to serve the business needs of the transit system and the population using the service. The issues was well-identified by a JTA board member who stated, "You have to serve the ridership or you will fail as a business but if you don't serve the business you will fail your ridership. A failure in one is a failure in the other and it's a hard line to walk, as in the fare increase. You don't want to charge riders more money but you have to take care of the business." Some board members with the broader community-wide focus on representation did not subdivide loyalties when pressed on whether they were voting or speaking for a particular group. There was a very strong recognition that system ridership is diverse and there needs to be a certain protection of the integrity of the system as a whole as opposed to any small

group.   As a LexTran member explained, "I'm a taxpayer too. Public transportation is critical to the community and that motivates me."

Just as some board members with community-wide concerns did not subdivide loyalties to riders, there were a very large number who did. A long-time board member justified, "I was appointed by the mayor and the populous. I do pay special attention to the ridership though." Even those few members identifying themselves as obligated to represent the mayor or parent government (the "purpose" of their appointment) were drawn to the voice of the rider when political obligations were set aside.

Loyalty to the rider is well validated and these individuals joined the vast majority of board members who were focused on the riders. The ridership is the customer base of the system and the single greatest source of non-tax funding. Users rely on public transportation services and fund a significant, although limited, portion of services. They are the direct recipients of services and are the sole justification for the organization's existence, regardless of who rides or does not. Non-riders have family, friends, co-workers and employees that ride public transportation. They receive goods and services delivered by users and reap the benefits of decreased pollution and traffic congestion. While there is general interest to emphasize public transportation as a service for all, these respondents almost always directed their particular attention to the transit dependent riders of the system, specifically the economically disadvantaged, elderly and disabled.

Individual Agendas & Decision-making

Transit executives are reliant on their boards for major decisions and function in an environment where they must balance system needs against board member

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preferences. Executives must develop an acute and precise awareness of how various

board members approach their roles and must place these members in representational

boxes to understand individual agendas, as described in the previous chapter. How board

members perceive their role in representation played out directly in terms of individual

preferences and agendas.

Where this concern solidifies is individual agendas, many of which develop over

the concern for transit dependent rides. A long-time transit rider who serves on an

authority board describes their personal connection to dependent populations and

explains: a choice rider "can choose other options. He's important too but the most

important group is those with no other choice. These are the people who need the most

representation." Another passionately avowed, "I believe I'm voting for advocacy of the

working poor. It's my passion in life to make sure they are served and have

transportation for a meaningful life. It's a moral obligation of the community to provide

[transit] service." Another board member saw transportation purely as a social service

and economic equity issue; an obligation to prevent already marginalized communities

from further neglect.

Beyond the economically disadvantaged dependent rider are also elderly and

disabled populations that rely heavily on public transportation. Transportation is such a

critical element to personal independence that the Americans with Disabilities Act

devotes entire sections to public transportation, including requirement of an entirely

separate paratransit service to provide equal access. Several board members were proud

of the disability representation and noted the focus and tenacity of those members on

disability issues. Disabled board members peppered their interview responses with

transportation accessibility issues in nearly every part of the interview. For example, a board member with active involvement in disability issues cited their appointment, overall focus, support for expanded services, acquisition of more vehicles and the protection of disability services from service cuts as their primary interest. Nearly every topic discussed surrounded disability issues, as this population often has no other options and because transportation is essential to the quality of life for all. They see their appointment to the board as a signal to the community that the system is serious about issues that are germane to that group and with that comes responsibility to see those needs are met.

Board members spoke extensively about responsiveness to not only service-related issues but also their primary areas of expertise and interest, such as in labor relations, safety and security and social service issues. Attorneys were very concerned with contract language and legal entanglements; finance-oriented board members were concerned with how reports were presented and organized; architects and planners had urban design concerns and approached transit from a service-development and delivery standpoint; and labor relations leaders were focused on employee treatment and collective bargaining. A member with extensive collective bargaining experience explained that on certain issues he will ask the executive to conduct more research and has seen changes in how the GM has corrected past approaches to employee discipline and more careful on documentation of processes. A board member with a background in safety and security supplemented this with, "I can always give input. I'm not always asked but I can give it. Anything with safety and security is my baby because it is an expertise I already have."

Throughout these interviews board members generally wore their interests on their sleeve and it showed in their preferred and actual involvement in decision-making, conflicts with fellow board members and the overall board-executive relationship. Overall, most board members identified a low level of in-depth financial involvement, a very weak-to-moderate political influence, an obvious feeling of constituency and need to represent and protect certain groups and a self-admitted concern for low-level, on street issues. Despite this, board members generally did not see themselves as involved in decision-making for managing of the transit system in a day-to-day sense. Most properly explained that that is the role of the executive to manage the system and did not really feel a need to get involved.

Despite the denial of interest in low-level decision-making, most board members could not help their interest in day-to-day operations. They expressed a natural interest in the management of the system and the ability to express concerns for important issues brought before them by riders, concerned citizens or through their own observations. A board member from JTA, for example, was very satisfied with his role because he had the day-to-day influence he wanted, arguing, "It happens every month: requests for additional stops, dealing with personnel and benefits and how it affects the budget. Occasionally buses are off schedule and citizens have issues and complaints. All of this is on a regular basis . . . just general input at board meetings." This was the actual feeling of most board members whether they admitted to system operations involvement or not.

Representation and agenda poured over into decision-making on a constant basis. A board member identifying himself as a conduit to the community explains, "Being involved on this end operationally has opened my eyes to issues about struggles to

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provide service. People don't understand the day-to-day but I did once I was on the other side and became involved," adding, "I'm here to meet the needs of the community . . . a liaison to understand the process and how things work." Others simply felt they had ability and responsibility to get involved in operational decisions—almost on a side-by-side level—thinking they have a better level of understanding and appreciation for the service than those who live and breathe transit as a career. Most of these responses came from board members who were riders of the system in the recent past or at present. One such rider/member described their desire to get involved with an on street operations issue as the problem unfolded in front of them. The board member reluctantly admitted the need to keep their distance because that is what board members are supposed to do, but there was clear desire to act as an enforcer of system operations.

Some members, especially those who are riders, see the impact of decisions first-hand and want to offer suggestions for route changes, not just approve them. They want to offer their input on new vehicles and even get involved in the inner workings of operations planning. One board member feels so involved in operational decision-making she sees her input as directly affecting services at a street level and on a constant basis. Another frequently calls and speaks to a department manager to advise him on how to deploy route schedules to be more effective and efficient to reduce the length of their own personal transit trips. Regular calls to complain about dirty floors, rude drivers and hot buses were the top areas of involvement in their duties and responsibilities. A top concern in virtually every answer was the service *they use*, with little or no concern for the remainder of the overall system.

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Several board members with strong university ties felt clear and direct responsibility to represent the university and its students. One such board member identified their primary concerns as the "university, then the rider." For members such as this, transit services to the university campus, how the campus population moves about campus, and the agreements with the university for services--clearly influenced their relationships with executives, their approach to their board duties and how they made decisions. Business leaders and those with connections to the downtown business districts were concerned with the impact of services, good or ill, on the business community and tourism industry. Attention was on supporting the economic interests through specialized downtown services, possibly as the risk of diverting resources from the core system city ridership. Riders were important but the redevelopment of downtown business districts and support of the tourism-visitor industry takes their precedence. Several board members acknowledged these types of issues as having significant impact on their decisions to cut or protect certain routes or how to allocate new resources.

In reality, most board members understood the need for restraint and there was a very strong contingent with no interest in day-to-day operational decisions. The focus is on the what, not the how, and on the long-term organizational ability to meet the community's comprehensive transportation needs. When asked how often they were involved in the day-to-day system management, a board member answered for this smaller group, "Hardly ever. We set policy and procedure and that provides the guidelines and boundaries within which the GM runs the organization."

But on occasion even those board members with a clear policy emphasis wished

for greater information relating to on street operations issues, how problems are being

handled and a clearer picture of organizational morale. They longed for the ability to get

the transfer center cleaner, take tours of the operations and maintenance facility and see

how operational decisions are made. Board members agreed it was natural to notice on

street problems but understood it is unhealthy to be involved with what bus goes on what

route—especially when staff should have greater ability for those decisions than board

members. Laughingly, a board member who has developed a strong understanding of

operations and strongly respects the lines of authority admits she occasionally crosses the

crosses the line and presses the executive over minor issues—but also applies some

reality to the circumstance: "[I know] I'm bossy . . . [and] don't know as much as I think

I do and I'm seeing it from a distance." These board members with the occasional desire

to get involved at an operational level recognize their limits as well as the importance of

the maintaining clear lines of board and executive authority.

Conflict

Conflict, past or present, emerged primarily when board members identified: 1)

poor communication, manifest through a lack of information, responsiveness or process;

or 2) strong board member desire for involvement in system operation. Executives and

board members agreed the effective functioning of the board-executive structure was

reliant on communication. Most board members were pleased with the overall level of

communication with the GM. They generally felt the executive was open, honest and

approached both system and board business with a fitting level of transparency while

properly directing their managerial authority. In the case of board members who had

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experienced poor managerial leadership under past executives, communication was the ultimate cause of the executive's downfall. For example, board members recalled past executives who were secretive regarding the real financial picture of the system—which could produce trust and credibility issues. In one especially telling case, there was a GM who claimed the $800,000 deficit would go away once budget adjustments were made. Then, following the performance audit, the actual deficit swelled to $1.5 million. The situation worsened when the GM allowed the board member to walk into a subsequent meeting without sharing this information beforehand, so that this stunning news was first heard by the board member during the auditor's presentation. Members also recalled situations in which GMs failed to notify the board about the loss of grant funds and had not taken steps to adjust services accordingly.

Communication was coupled with responsiveness and how well executives effectively and promptly replied to board and individual requests. For board members, this emerged throughout interviews but gained prominence when discussing executive responsiveness to board and individual concerns. Communication is not just the big-picture items of board responsibility and by-laws. Nearly all board members felt the executive was very responsive to board and individual concerns expressed to the general manager. Members commonly reported the need to know about street level service and internal management concerns such as buses running ahead of schedule, the inconveniences of certain bus stops locations, shelter placement or complaints from customers.

Board members, although much fewer in number, were also focused on more high-level issues including the regular status of the budget, review of administrative

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salary scales and were focused less on the subject but rather process. Process also matters considerably to board members. Even when everyone is not on the same page— board members and executives alike—process takes center stage because it is the mechanism that drives board member decision-making. Data and information packages, explanations from consultants and executive expertise only go so far. The process of information and summary reports mixed with opportunity for board questioning of staff assumptions and ideologies for recommendations is how board members develop comfort levels for decisions. This is very important when all board members are not on the same page. Sometimes the data and information is not sufficient or is based on certain assumptions that board members are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with. When the executive recommends "X" with reasoning and support information but the board chooses "Y", the executive must be willing to follow the board's direction and respect the process. As a past board chair explained, "If the board says to do it [and it is a bad decision] it's our problem."

Timely communications is important, as seen in the case of a member who reported being extremely frustrated when an executive suddenly added an important agenda item for a meeting of the full board, including a published notice for a public hearing involving major changes in operation of a service, which fell within the jurisdiction of a committee he/she chaired. The executive added this formal agenda item at the last possible moment without any advance warning, bothering the member greatly. While the GM provided very good reasons for adding this item—advance notice and discussion would have delayed action for another forty five days until the next board meeting—but the board member did not appreciate the lack of concern for their

perspective and the opportunity to ask important questions. "I probably would have been furious but he had a really good reason." The board member was still able to ask questions and address issues one-on-one with ample board opportunity to discuss the issue in committee and at the board meeting—but it was after the process had begun. For them the frustration was not related to the formal process but the informal understanding between the executive and the membership.

While responsiveness to board initiated concerns was important so was awareness of ongoing and surprise events such as bus accidents and potentially explosive employee terminations. Board members, especially chairs, felt a great need to aware of what is going on whether low- or high-level. They like no surprises, whether a phone call from a staff member or driver who was terminated, the rogue union member, the local politician who heard something at a meeting or the media calling for a statement on the fatal accident or bus fire. These items are generally few and far between but represent one of the many areas an executive can run afoul of a board member with heightened interest in internal operations. Board members just *want* to know about these things, even when no one from the outside is asking questions.

Often defensiveness colors an executive's responsiveness. An executive may be extremely thorough in the research and prompt in the delivery of information but defensiveness has created direct conflict in several instances and in more ways than the obvious example of an executive-board member argument. Sometimes it is second-guessing the board by providing the information the executive *thinks* the board wants to see instead of what is asked for. A GM once told a board member, "I told the staff not to bring it to you because I knew you would not accept it," after a resolution failed. I asked

the board member if they felt this was a situation where the executive was keeping things from the board or just learning from the past and following board leadership? She explained the conflict was more about an unwillingness to try for change and fail, along with the executive's defensiveness and frustration that follows. She added, "You never know you won't like it or pass it unless you've had a chance to hear it."

Conflict was not solely directed at executive communication and responsiveness to concerns. "Our board doesn't have any concerns," a board member explained. The only things discussed were on the agenda and any discussion comes from him. The frustration is that the GM does not look to the board for guidance and the board does nothing to bring up concerns they may have. When discussing how that member approaches his individual concerns he explains that he has essentially acquiesced to the executive because of past circumstances related to his board appointment, "I walk such a narrow line that I don't know how effective I am [as a board member]."

The most detrimental conflict occurs when board members desire to become involved in the heart of managerial authority—the selection, allocation and management of human resources. At one of the systems included in this study there was a strong level of concern from those involved in system governance that board involvement in human resource decisions is creating a very awkward and fragile board member-board member and board-executive relationship through the constant questioning and involvement in personnel management. The product of this involvement is seeping into effective system governance and detracted from board ability for effective decisions in a number of ways. First, board members articulated that communication has been severely damaged because this particular board member has decided to become involved with personnel issues,

including collective bargaining unit demands and complaints to which the member is sympathetic. This member uses a board position to transfer information from the labor union to the mayor. Communication from this board member to the rest of the board and the executive was described as one-way information seeking along with asking questions and demanding changes but with no real filtering of issues or absorbing the advice and counsel of their colleagues.

Second, members of the board felt the actions and statements are detrimental to the quality and stature of the board, as attention to public airing of concerns takes precedent over accomplishments and service in the eyes of the media, local politicians and the community. Third, board members within this system are frustrated because a board member's individual preferences have emerged into a publicly aired, single-issue agenda at the expense of responsibility to the service. The opinion has surfaced that the board member is no longer as dedicated to the functional responsibility of the board such as participation in committee meetings, pre-board meeting discussions and regular interaction in outside events. The board has a strong desire to maintain a policy-based, service-oriented, non-political environment where decisions are made for the sake of the system's riders and long-term viability. The conveyance of concerns outside the confines of the board weakens solidarity and creates an undercurrent where the presentation of concerns, not the substance, is creating problems.

Yet, there was no real belief from the board membership this specific member is wrong for the questions asked or spirit of the discussion. Concern was for the process through which these issues are addressed. Most involved feel this has been fully addressed and resolved through a fact-based discussion and review of the issues. In

essence, the board has decided, either formally or informally, that the issues are resolved insofar as board responsibility allows. Now there is a sense that a continued undercurrent of an individual's desire for involvement in personnel selection and the resulting agenda may turn from frustration to conflict.

Board involvement in staffing decisions and managerial approaches are also of concern. A situation described during the interviews was a board member who feels the executive underuses staff for system outreach with excessive amount of time focused on operational issues—despite the executive's focus on operations issues and communication as a means to deliver quality service. The board member has discussed this directly with the GM and knows the executive's decision is to emphasize more on street service with strong support but the member feels a lack of outreach is like opening a new store on Main St. and not putting an "open" sign in the window. This has been a constant struggle between this board member and the executive and has created a tenuous, sometimes outright distant relationship. A relationship that was once described as excellent has slowly eroded over time, according to the board member but overall remains good and in tact. The board member has genuine concern for executive decisions regarding use of staff for community relations and outreach but that is a smaller area of the overall scope of the organization and the executive excels in other areas that overcomes what the board member perceives as a misuse of staffing.

Even board members who know they have no control over personnel, fully recognize management authority over personnel and respect that distinction exhibit frustration with the board-employee disconnect. Most members understand the executive is the sole authority over hired personnel but they struggle with an excellent executive

that builds a generally strong, competent staff but still disagrees with certain executive

decisions. This was present on a significant number of occasions and the interviews were

littered with references to certain effective or ineffective staff members, questions of

hiring decisions and promotion practices, how they delegate and allocate their staff and

how executives discipline employees. Some question their colleagues' concern,

wondering whether much of what arose as concerns was gossip being treated as fact.

There was also real frustration over the board's inability to hold the local union

employees accountable for their actions—citing the separation of the management rights

to manage and negotiate with the union from the ultimate board responsibility for the

authority.

Conflict was often tied to very deep-rooted problems with how the executive

managed the organization and was based on self-identified, individual agendas with

strong levels of personal involvement in the surrounding controversy. In each instance

where serious conflict existed the board member had significant levels of expertise and

investment in a specific community or policy issue and the board member's concerns

were specific to that issue. Outside board concerns or even agreement with other

organizational functions may have existed but once these concerns were solidified and

articulated, individual perspective on board responsibility completely shifted in terms of

focus and agenda.

Overall, conflict is driven by a lack of communication between the board and

executive, mostly from the executive to the board, and when board members have

increased desire for involvement in executive decisions. Executives must work carefully

and constantly to be responsive to board concerns but also to keep the members well

informed of issues that may come before them, especially major financial issues and controversial subjects. Boards do not like to be surprised. Within this, the executives must pay considerable attention to formal and informal processes, as organizational norms often drive board expectations and opportunity for input. When processes are bypassed or changed, frustration is more likely to emerge, especially if it done out of defensiveness. Boards want to opportunity to discuss and debate items—they do not have the same personal stake in items as executives—and do not mind tearing recommendations apart. Executives that become defensive and begin to avoid putting recommendations before the board may run afoul of the members. Finally, conflict frequently develops when there is a string desire for involvement in executive decisions. Most often this involves personnel and treads on the board-executive relationship because it calls executive authority into question and is often tied to very personal feelings of equity and accountability.

Board Perspectives on the Board-Executive Relationship

The above descriptions of conflict and frustration allow for in-depth discussion and consideration of the primary causes of board-executive conflict from a board perspective—communication and personnel management—along with discussion of where and how these issues play out. It must first be clarified that throughout the sample there were few board members that identified serious conflict among board members or with the executive. There was significant conflict but it generally involved a single issue that had either been resolved and the parties had come to an amicable agreement or agreed to disagree and let it not interfere with board operations. This was evident when almost every board member identified the relationship with the executive as good or

excellent and felt the same existed between the executive and the other members of the board. Most board members described a professional, respectful and comfortable relationship founded on the business of the transportation system and the responsibilities of the board and the authority as a whole. Even those with serious concerns identified the relationship as "fair" and generally respected the executive's position and the need to run the organization as they see fit but those members did not agree with how the executive went about those decisions or the results.

Nearly all board members considered their relationship with the General Manager as at least "good." Many thought them excellent. All of the board members interviewed rated their GM as an effective manager of the transit system. All were supportive of the job the GM was doing. Overall most felt the executive was caring for the riders, employees and communities, was invested in the system and was straightforward and honest. Board-executive conflict emerged when a there was lack of trust in executive decisions that played out within the specialized agendas of the board members. Of those board members indicating a particularly close relationship, none identified a relationship that exists from events outside the authority's business. The leading response to why members had particularly strong, positive relationships surrounded service as board chair or vice chair, service on particularly involved committees or side-by-side efforts such as facility projects or Lexington's referendum process. Positive and negative relationships were typically a product of internal authority business, not outside political divisions.

Also impacting relationships and support level was board member and executive tenure. The longer the board member and executive serves, the greater the appreciation and trust that develops as they experience how the GM manages resources, solves

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problems, interacts with the board, handles political involvement and manages

employees. Even new board members come to appreciate the long years of service and

the expertise and experience GMs accrue. As long as nothing occurs to significantly

harm the relationship, board members remain loyal and supportive because executive

success is seen as equal to board success. Time solidifies these feelings and helps to heal

fresh wounds.

Supportive board members acknowledging a good or better relationship felt the

executive was effective because the GM listened to what the board said, whether as a

group or one-on-one. Guidance on labor issues, economic strategies, service planning,

facility planning and political direction was important to individuals, if not the entire

board, and the executive's open ear to concerns was highly valued. Often it was the little

things that board members latched on to: after-hours e-mails to make sure the board

member understood the discussion from the board meeting; post-board meeting

conversations to gather expertise; or getting an "am I crazy but . . ." opinion. The same

was true for low-level service issues such as vandalized shelters, a bus without working

air conditioning or inclusion in selecting new marketing materials and promotional items.

The effectiveness of the executives was measured by as much by the employees

surrounding them as their management style and responsiveness. GM and organizational

weaknesses in budgeting, finance, marketing or planning were noted but were often past

issues due to the executive's ability to recruit, develop and retain a high caliber staff to

lead the organization. To board members organizational success is defined as being on

budget, increasing ridership and managing effectively. Support is also driven by the

quality of the information board members have at their disposal. Most felt they had

enough information to make effective decisions, are supplied a variety of options and are provided more information as requested.

Connected to excellent staff and organizational ability was the ability to garner further expertise from management firms such as First Transit and Professional Transit Management. In the case of executives employed by management firms, board members had glowing praise for both Professional Transit Management and First Transit and felt that the resources offered to the board members and executives made them more effective in their responsibilities. Board members from systems with management firm general managers identified the corporate staff by name and touted them for individual handling of the board, professional board development services and the technical expertise available.

CONCLUSION

Chapters Three and Four provided a complete picture of the ways executives and board members perceive the role boards play in policy-making, formal and informal direction of organizational goals, influence on the political landscape and the effectiveness of individual and collective members. First, executives and board members are in general agreement regarding the political influence of the respective boards and the preferred levels of involvement in service-oriented, low-level policy. Second, board members and executives are also in general agreement on the representational boxes in which board members are placed, as board members self-identify their individual agendas and described how those agendas shape decision-making and manifest through conflict.

Third, board and executives perceive very similar levels of support from the board for the executive and have similar rationales for this support. Finally, board and executives describe two distinctly different understandings of what constitutes financial power and authority, depending on the executive and board member. It is from the fusion of executive and board observations and realities that we may now seek to understand what impacts the board executive relationship.

Chapter Five juxtaposes the findings from executives with those of board members to evaluate the expectations presented in Chapter One regarding authority financial power's impact on board member agendas and whether increased conflict is a product of this scenario. More importantly, the research questions posited in Chapter One are considered in depth with an emphasis on examining the role perceptions of board members and how these perceptions impact both when board members seek involvement in executive decision-making and the impact of that involvement on the board-executive relationship.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF EXPECTATIONS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Important to public authorities is the power and scope of the agency, as measured through their financial power. Chapter One described a shift of political and financial power from public transportation authorities to parent governments creating an environment of increased conflict based upon the premise that an absence of high-level policy opportunity results in low-level players on public authority boards. The argument was presented that low-level players bring *service-level* rather than policy agendas to their positions, which would differ from the executive's service-level agenda. As a result there was an expectation of significant organizational conflict as a product of this situation. In this chapter the basic arguments and expectations are considered in light of the personal interviews conducted for the study. Specific attention is paid to formulating answers to the research questions presented in Chapter One. Ultimately this chapter considers the board-executive relationship in terms of conflict and encroachment on executive territory. Executive and board member interviews are analyzed to establish a fundamental understanding of how the individual transportation authorities function. Close attention is paid to high- and low-level policy, individual agendas, board preferences for decision-making and the support levels yielded from these closely connected elements.

EVALUATING THE EXPECTATIONS

Arguments and Expectations

Public transportation authorities are a popular creation of parent governments to govern the complex and business-like issues surrounding urban mass transit service delivery. The unique political structure, narrow scope of responsibility and need to manage the day-to-day services produces a circumstance where the ability to control the organization's destiny is reliant on board and executive ability to develop and execute policy toward the achievement of organizational goals. Most critical to this function is the ability to make financial decisions and direct resources toward these organizational goals. Problematic is the shift of financial authority away from authorities to parent governments, creating considerable control on how these quasi-governments function. The removal of financial power from the authority creates strain on the board-executive relationship based upon the following expectations:

1. The shift of fiscal power from the public authority to the parent government yields a significant loss of the authority's political power, reducing the willingness of influential and politically astute individuals to serve on the authority board.

2. In the absence of high-level political actors, lower-level community activists and players with service-related agendas fill public transportation board positions. The lower-level agendas of board members will be focused heavily on service-related issues that fall primarily under the scope and authority of the transit executive.

3. This will lead to greater conflict between the executive and board members as agendas conflict or as the executive resists involvement by the board in those areas. The result is decreased support for the executive by individual board members.

The argument is limited fiscal power reduces willingness of influential individuals to serve on these authorities and creates a board comprised of members with limited political efficacy unable to develop and maintain political capital. The executive must move from administering programs and managing resources to mission building and policy-making and when political capital is needed the board has relatively little to offer. Low-level players form boards with a lower-level policy focus, of which most concerns fall under the authority of the executive.

Financial Power and Board Political Power

In the evaluation of this expectation there are several significant criteria for consideration. First, attention is paid to significant limitations of financial power and whether this yields a significant loss of board political power as described and expected above. To examine this criterion the transit systems are individually considered regarding financial authority and board ability to influence internal and external policy decisions to guide and direct funding—the key source of power to the organization. Second, the criterion of whether this level of power is relative to the boards by examining the overall political influence of the boards at the individual transit systems at the individual and collective levels.

Most of the transit systems—executives and boards alike—described a board with limited ability of to impact budget processes. In public transportation the vast majority of

financial requirements are non-policy decisions required for operation such as fuel, wages, utilities, and insurance. The board has no influence in most of these areas because of market and national trends. Wages and insurance cuts would draw ire from unions and politicians and risk employee unrest while procurement and cost containment alternatives are often nominal in savings. This leaves little budget flexibility while opportunity for influence is usually post-budget. Boards are also limited because budgets are staff driven due to expertise and experience required for development and staffs are comprised of well-educated transit professionals with increased financial expertise. Additionally, boards lack solid understanding of highly complex funding of formula and statewide discretionary grants, capital vs. operating limitations and specialized non-changeable grants.

Dedicated funding through fuel or property taxes is more critical because it provides considerable amounts of funding for the system, reduces reliance on federal, state and local governments and most importantly allow systems to plan long-range with consistent funding streams—a constant problem when a board and executive are on pins and needles waiting for final budget numbers. This is where board effectiveness could reach its zenith—a board that can recommend and implement new revenue would instantly become more important and would place the authority in position to make giant steps. Once again, reliance on other political forces to permit referendums, invoke eminent domain, increase taxes or allow pre-grant receipt spending authority is a significant obstacle to managing system growth.

Post-parent government approval is the stage that boards have the most budget formulation influence. They have power to force staff reductions to create new on street

service, initiate service restructuring to reduce one route to augment another (or create a new one), cancel programs or shift amounts from one line item to another because of individual or board preferences. Boards rarely force these decisions because staffs are already lean and would reduce authority professionalism and service quality, something boards and executives highly value. Additionally boards are generally reluctant to take resources away from existing services to bolster another. The major resource most boards have at their disposal to fund non-budgeted expenses comes in the way of fare increases; however, fare increases can be counterproductive because small fare increases do not yield significant revenue for the system and can actually decrease ridership as the cost outweighs the benefits of transit use (especially among low-income users). This is especially the case with large fare increases (generally more than 10%) (TCRP 2003).

Described in the interviews was a board-involved process of meetings, explanations, pre-process approvals, line item adjustments and final budget approval; however, it is clear this is staff and parent government driven and the board has limited levels of influence. Boards actually yield the most potential influence in financial management and capital planning. Financial management comes through oversight of budgeted revenue and expenditures and is established with monthly reports, reviews and questions from the board or committee along with procedural requirements for contracts and purchases. These avenues provide constant awareness and involvement in financial issues.

As described by the GMs, the key to formal, high-level fiscal power does not manifest in budget planning but rather purchases and contracts that originate out of capital planning and long-term focus. An executive focused on technological "bells and

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whistles" can be rebuffed by a board that redirects funding to new vehicles but often

these initiatives are driven by needs of outdated equipment, elevating service quality or

spending capital money because is it there. This is a dangerous area for boards not fully

informed about operating costs for new staff or maintaining the capital purchases because

additional operating costs can absorb or delay on street funding. A board is more

powerful when cognizant of these implications, raises concerns and asks important

questions. Still, it is difficult for boards to become closely involved in actual

procurements. The request for proposal and bidding processes are internally managed,

extremely complex, and technically involved so the board member's routine and obvious

procurement questions are usually an exercise of checks and balances, not power or

influence. Ultimate responsibility rests with the board but they are realistically

uninformed at the technical level and incapable of close involvement due to complexity

and time commitment.

Of the systems in this study, several exhibited considerable levels of influence in

financial management and oversight plus capital planning and spending. For MTA in

Nashville, financial management came as a function of board reassertion of financial

oversight powers. Citing a dearth of financial oversight and management by the past

general manager and considerable lack of funding from the city, the board obtained

mayoral commitment to *possible* increased funding contingent on solving managerial

problems. A comprehensive operations assessment, performed at board direction, and

subsequent management changes have since yielded significant city funding increases, as

has overall management of budget processes. Due to board diligence the budget is no

longer the exclusive domain of executives.

Board approach to revenue increases came in 2004 with new fare structures—not a true fare increase but budget-friendly revenue through increased ticket sales. MTA's board places considerable value in approving contracts to control spending but recently increased executive purchase limits from $50,000 to $100,000. There is less focus on spending processes but much more attention to funding use in terms of mission and policy goals. Increased funding allowed the MTA board to develop higher-level financial policy power due to parent government restoration of operating funds. Even though MTA competes with city departments and agencies for funds the board and executive have established a high-level policy focus.

Now attention is the on the $40 million Central Station in the core of downtown. Securing local funding and the required match funds is a challenge that has allowed the board to flex its muscles at the state and local levels. But, it has brought with it a political environment with daunting challenges at every turn—from land use conflicts among stakeholders to shifting project timelines. What severely limits board ability to achieve consistent high-level policy is the inability to pass resolutions to directly fund the system. All local funding comes from the parent government—the single greatest obstacle to service expansion and growth. The absence of funding power puts the executive at the budgetary forefront and forces reliance on non-authority powers for sustenance.

Evaluation of the MTA board's political power and influence in funding issues shows they are considerably limited; they are creative in approach but lack the political capital to ensure dedicated funding. Also, major corporate executives from Bell South, Gaylord Entertainment or even policy makers such as former mayors and Metro Council

are noticeably absent. While this may seem lofty, a high-level policy board with taxing power might draw such individuals to provide stepping stones to higher office, especially considering Nashville's growing national attention and economic growth.

Despite the absence of dedicated funding and extremely high-level players the level of attention to finance has drawn a considerably strong board. The chair and past chair both hold prominence in political circles for past service in the governors' office and as executive directors of public and non-profit organizations. Well connected is a board member from Vanderbilt University and the school's prominence and impact has extended influence on behalf of MTA. Two other board members carry considerable weight in their communities and are politically active: a well-known social leader with connections to grass roots organizations and a long-time labor leader. The board felt their power and influence fell somewhere between moderate and powerful or as one member best described, "not strong, but in the mix." Both the members and executive identified the board as having influence with the mayor and exercising influence in specific policy areas but closeness to council and more political activity was cited as important for gaining more influence. The key is that these board members are as powerful and influential as they can be, given their make up and circumstance: "We are who we are."

Like Nashville, Memphis has no dedicated funding for MATA and also absent are major players in downtown redevelopment or corporate ownership. Mayor Harrington's appointees are former education colleagues and friends—individuals he trusts—but that is limiting in regards to influence outside the mayor's office. Connections exist outside the mayor but are considerably lessened and members carry relatively little policy-

making experience or expertise. There is some corporate representation from FedEx but neither member was identified as holding any strong influence and one's activity is lessened by retirement. The seventh member of the board was appointed to represent persons with disabilities and has no real political or business ties. Yet, MATA exhibits some relatively high-level policy power, as seen in past and planned large-scale rail capital expenditures. Memphis leads all systems in capital funding due to more than $30 million spent on the streetcar system and light rail planning initiative to date. Renovation of downtown's Central Station, expansion of the downtown streetcar system and the proposed $400 million rail light project create tremendous opportunity to direct and shape transportation development on a massive, regional scale. MATA board decisions on which corridors to serve, which major rail stops to fund and how to ensure the system is expandable for future rail planning and bus transportation networks requires considerable levels of information and involvement in issues. This is decision-making at a high level and board action is predominantly directed at funding strategies, capital allocations and global service levels.

Where MATA's board members are having the largest amount of difficulty is in the local funding process. Chapter Four described board members with significant concern regarding the ability of the city to first commit and then actually devote the funding necessary to meet grant match requirements. Board members feel their level of influence amounts to "not much," "moderate," and "some clout." Only one member felt any sense of power but in consideration of the power other board members wield, this member's actual level of influence is extremely limited. The board simply cannot deliver the influence to secure the funding because the mayor relies on his city school system

connections to fill out the majority of the board. What is produced is a collection of lower-level members performing at high-levels.

Chattanooga follows the trend of no dedicated funding and CARTA submits to the competitive funding process through the City of Chattanooga. They rely heavily on city budget allocations to maintain service with exception of the revenue generated from the Incline and two downtown parking garages. The Incline and garages fund other parts of the system and success has prompted plans for a third garage, requiring CARTA's Downtown Committee to be intimately involved in the design and build phases of the project. The committee has had considerable control over project parameters in the past, including usage policies, joint development agreements and construction involvement. In reality, the committee does the lion's share of board work for these projects and most of the board has little awareness of complex project details. For this new garage much of the work may be turned over to a private firm, which may reduce board involvement further.

While the Incline and garages offer a significant amount of revenue for CARTA, the board has very weak budget impact. The budget is staff driven and the board can force reallocation of funds from one line item to another but rarely does. In the area of financial management, the board is also generally weak. There is a review and questions are asked but reliance is on the auditor and processes that look like oversight. The board secretary approves all purchases over $2,000 but the secretary has no formalized training in accounting and is essentially rubberstamping checks. At one time the secretary delivered the financial report but turnover saw new secretaries with lower financial interest and oversight declined. Now the GM and staff prepare and deliver the report

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with decreased board involvement and responsibility. This also formed as the executive gained expertise and now the board defers to executive guidance on financial matters. Most of the board members responded the board has very little influence in the Chattanooga political landscape. Only one member, a county commissioner, is thought to have any political clout. Board members simply do not possess any real political capital and what little they have is within narrow communities of limited political significance.

On a much smaller scale is JTA. First, in budget and finance direction they have limited influence because the city of Jackson is not the primary source of service funding—the state and federal grant shares actually combine to support a tremendous amount of on street services through specialized grants. Until recently the board was not actually involved in the budget process but instead just approved route and service issues with approval of limited contracts and purchases exceeding $10,000. The board is, however, very involved in financial decision-making for a number of items such as whether to re-build or surplus equipment or whether to replace a long-term employee absence with overtime or a part-time employee. The small operating scope has the board making few high-level, cost or policy decisions with most activity focused on keeping existing services operating.

Considering JTA's fleet of only twenty vehicles, with the last sets of buses and vans bought through bid options from St. Louis and Nashville procurements, the board has limited opportunity for capital influence for vehicles. The board is working to fund and build a modern maintenance and operations facility in Jackson. JTA board members are involved with state and local officials to arrange funding and find an acceptable site

that is functional for system operations and palatable to local leaders. Also of extreme

interest among the board members was procurement of new bus stop shelters for the route

network. The board views itself as moderate to very weak in terms of political power and

influence. For some board members, there is no desire to exercise influence and for

others there has not been a need. The board has little involvement in issues requiring

high-level decisions or a need to garner or wield power. Processes are routine and mainly

low-level and even the two former county commissioners on the board acknowledge no

real board power beyond JTA. Outside of the two former commissioners, there is an

attorney from a local college, a minister, a director of a convalescence home, an

insurance broker and a telecommunications laborer with Bell South. Each has some

influence within their respective communities but few have any influence upward or

outward of their communities or the board.

The odd exception to the concept of capital planning and financial management as

the primary source of board fiscal power is at LexTran. In Lexington's case the

referendum has provided considerable opportunity to fund expanded service through the

direct property tax on Lexington-Fayette County. The board governs the only authority

with a dedicated revenue stream that delivers a significant amount of power to the board

membership. The board has control over the allocation of funds for budget line items and

final budget approval, as altered by board preferences (although the mayor and council

must approve the board's version under state statute). Now that council has lost most

fiscal control of LexTran—they do have some control over limited funding but not

enough to impact the organization significantly—the board and executive are able to plan

system growth and spend accordingly. Having more money to spend has now become

the easy part of the equation; now decisions are priority-based and vacillate between the commitment to restoring lost service vs. tapping into more lucrative and higher ridership markets.

The board funded a comprehensive operational analysis to look at route performance, revenue opportunities and evaluate service efficiency based on expected trends for a city and system of Lexington's size. The analysis provided a road map for system improvement; however, opportunity to implement a downtown trolley network, expand park-and-ride services and build a university partnership is now tempered by the capital planning process. New service must be supported by capital purchases of vehicles, expanded facilities and customer amenities such as signs and shelters. While operating assistance is funded by the local tax, capital funding is formula and discretionary-based and not immediately available to the authority. The slower trickle of capital funds makes it difficult for the board to maintain long-term focus as new ideas and initiatives may run counter to established strategies. The board can always choose to expedite capital acquisition by directly purchasing equipment but that would spend operating costs unnecessarily and fail to take advantage of "free" money from the federal government for fleet expansion and facilities growth.

Even with dedicated funding, the LexTran board feels they are considerably weak on the political scene and exert little influence. There are seven members and only one has employment in the private sector as the manager of major architecture firm—the remaining seven have public sector ties. One member is a retired city fire fighter and labor leader; two have connections to university administration while another is a neurosurgeon at a university hospital; one works for the federal bureau of prisons; and the

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last works in compliance with equal employment opportunity programs for the state.

Even with this emphasis on government, social service and public consciousness—focus

that is indicative of lower-level service-oriented policy—LexTran's board is changing.

There is decreasing emphasis on "formula" board representation and the board is focused

on attracting more high-level names with stronger political connections. Despite only

one African American on the board, the mayor's two most recent appointees have been

white males with strong connections in business and medical fields. The chair position

shifted from an attorney to a CPA so there would be greater attention to the spending

patterns and analysis on a more consistent basis. The appointment of a labor relations-

oriented board member has not "quieted" the labor community but rather improved

internal processes and now complaints are usually viewed as baseless. This board

member does not look for every opportunity to throw money at the union to quiet and

appease them—rather attention is on effective spending for efficient services.

The board is struggling with themselves to balance their many service interests

against the limited opportunity they have—new trolley routes vs. restoring service lost

five years ago. They have greater attention to their responsibilities and are enacting an

attendance policy for themselves. Even board activity has changed with work session

meetings more collegial and candid because of televised monthly board meetings. The

committee meeting is where they ask the hard questions, get to the bottom of issues and

make their decisions. Board meetings hint toward the occasional grandstanding but are

otherwise reserved to the basic functions of voting and the occasional question that arises

during the meeting.

This board is among the vanguard because they have transitioned from having no power to having ample power of spending, service development and political voice but remain very attentive to service-oriented concerns and maintained a strong working relationship with the executive. The concern is whether this group can sustain this approach long-term. As service unfolds, priorities may change and attempts to force shifts in implementation schedules can heap impossible or exceptionally difficult expectations on the executive. Overemphasis on service development and growth without adequate staffing to develop new service (new programs are more labor intensive to develop than maintain once operational) may overextend the organization and reduce quality output. The LexTran board has historically been a low-level policy, low-power board and since the referendum changed to a high-level policy, low-power board. Money has changed their perspective and the power to make internal change has translated into higher levels of decision-making. Of interest is whether the board can grow external power with the same group of players or if the board must turn over its membership to gain the power players LexTran needs outside the authority.

Having established the backgrounds, fiscal powers and levels of influence available to the board members, it becomes clear there are two higher-level, high-performing boards in Nashville and Lexington but neither is a complete high-level policy board because power is generally internal. Nashville is as close to reaching the preferred level of power and experience on a policy board without actually bringing in the power players. The board is active, aware, connected upward and downward, has a eye toward management and oversight of finances and brings together policy expertise and experience to guide the organization and make decisions that are effective for the users

and beneficial to the operation. If they had LexTran's referendum, MTA might have one of the premier boards and systems within the Southeast. The revenue stream is their Achilles heel. Just below MTA is LexTran, a board with strong financial power and responsibility but still finding its way after years of darkness. The board will have to develop strong levels of policy expertise and financial planning in order to develop implementation schedules and analytical frameworks to determine which services are successful and deserve to extend beyond a demonstration or "idea" period. If the board does not develop into the policy approach of MTA, LexTran will have too much service for its city and taxpayers will tire of the referendum and rescind the funding.

Further down is MATA, a lower-level board that has strong experience in government and logistical services but lacks the political capital to force support the largest public transportation project in Tennessee's history and one of the largest in the Southeast.   They cannot deliver the support to obtain the funding but they approach the light rail project with sincerity and awareness of issues that guide effective decision-making. Like Nashville, they have taken advantage of opportunity but with a more homogenous and operations-oriented group (administrators and business types) than the policy-oriented group from Nashville and with arguably fewer connections. Continuing on is CARTA and JTA, two systems that were nearly void of high-level board members with political power and policy influence. Most board members have little interest in the raw financial processes but participate on a surface level and keep slight awareness of financial activities while following the lead of others. These boards collectively described an absence of planning. Short and long-term and decisions seem to be made by the executive with routine approval of measures—because the recommended action is

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almost always the best course of direction for the system and the circumstances or because the board does not know to ask otherwise. In either case there is board complacency on high-level and even medium-level issues while latching on to low-level service issues and following the direction of the executive.

Low-level Players and Service-Related Agendas

Do low-level players have service-related agendas and concerns? It appears they do when one examines the available financial power and budget control, financial oversight, and capital planning. When strong levels of financial power are available boards can exercise greater attention to high-level policy and better guide mission. In the cases of CARTA and JTA, each system has experienced weak fiscal authority due to limited opportunity for budget control translating into surface-level financial oversight. CARTA experienced a clear reduction in power as years of service reductions gutted the authority of service while cities like Soddy Daisy and Redbank withdrew from the authority, taking with them funding for services and crosscutting policy influence. The result is a board that is no longer a true regional authority but a city service with some funding from the county and a county mayor appointed and county commission approved board member.

The boards for CARTA and JTA are comprised of low-level players from public service and local organizations interspersed throughout the community and bringing different ideas to the table. This is not unique to those cities, as high-performing boards such as MTA or LexTran also have members best described as lower-level players. This evaluation will be looking at the criteria of whether lower-level board members had a lower-level, service-oriented policy interest. Additionally, these areas will be reviewed

as whether they are items under executive or board purview. This examination will approach the board members as a group because CARTA and JTA are generally imbalanced toward low-level members compared to the other systems. Additionally, one-by-one identification of agendas is not allowable due to the type of study and confidentiality expected from the sample.

All authorities in this study included some low-level board members; however the expectation was that the absence of financial power would create boards comprised of community activists and low-level players with service specific agendas. When considering the employment backgrounds, the personal preferences regarding services, the individual interests of representation and protection of the ridership, especially low-income riders the expectation rings true—lower levels of power have a pattern of attracting lower-level players. Even when there are a considerable number of board members that are professionals in law, education, finance or architecture they tend to be lower-level players in terms of the power they wield but lack service specific agendas. They sit on the board because of professional expertise or mayoral connection and possess a willingness to serve. During the interviews these board members typically expressed no internal motivation for joining the board, had no specific interest in the authority or services and still see their role as helping to be good stewards of public funds, offering viewpoints for consideration and guidance where possible.

When removing that group, there is a large segment of board members that represent specific partners or organizations with vested interest in the authority and its services. Universities have service-related interests with actual funding and service partnerships and there is a large number of members with social service and advocacy

concerns for the disabled, elderly and low-income communities. All five authorities had

some board members with a university or social service tie-in and a large number of

those board members identified themselves very strongly with on street concerns.

Several university-employed board members identified student-oriented service concerns,

social service affiliated members had concerns related to job training, employment access

to higher paying jobs and service at varying hours to reach employment centers. These

are low-level service concerns that hint at global service issues (access to education and

employment, for example) but were discussed by these board members in the narrow

view routes serving specific users.

Those with a stated interest in disability services viewed nearly every topic as a

MATA-plus, Care-A-Van or The Lift service issue (paratransit services for MATA,

CARTA and JTA, respectively). On time performance, routing and customer service

were commonly reviewed during interviews and are purely street level concerns.

Occasional discussion covered adequate numbers of paratransit drivers and vehicles to

meet service demands but how service is delivered through drivers and equipment is the

responsibility of the executive, especially in the absence of meaningful policy standards.

Board members failed to address the high-level disability challenges of funding streams

for specialized services (nursing homes and adult day care), establishing strict service

eligibility standards, moving paratransit dependent riders to fixed route services or policy

to balance choices between replacing aged paratransit vans vs. transit buses.

Among these social service-focused board members was the inescapable focus of

protecting transit dependent riders and routes against choice riders such as park-and-ride

or downtown shuttles. The low-income, minority community was of top concern for one

or more board members at each system study-wide. Concern from these members was geared to social equality and access to transportation as a right but was almost always couched in the needs of the working poor and black neighborhoods, the historic ridership base of urban mass transit. Social advocates spoke of how transit service has to be: frequent, early and late enough to get to work or home; on time because a missed trip could mean a very long wait or a lost job; and near retail and industry because they host the higher-paying jobs for workers. The more a board member knows about transit use, either through his or her own use (past or present) or their close connection with current users, the greater interest these board members had in the actual service. The same can be said of board members with an affinity for involvement in human resources, either the front line employee or the administrative staff. Some board members indicated a desire to help select staff members, control the make-up of the staff by emphasizing descriptive qualities of race and gender and finally control the contract with, and treatment of, the collective bargaining unit from a monetary and working conditions standpoint.

Often board members are appointed because they represent a particular group or interest and when board members are selected or recruited for purposes of representing a segment of the community it creates a situation where these non-elected public appointees feel they have a constituency. These board members have no such responsibility and should have no focus other than ensuring the success of the public authority. When the board member is appointed to represent a group of people the board member becomes far less inclined to serve mayoral or transit system interests but rather those of a non-existent constituency. In some instances the board member may be extremely connected to a segment of the community and is seen as a leader, therefore is

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able to garner significant public support for involvement in issues. In these cases a real but illegitimate constituency exists. In other cases, the board member has a certain level of experience and expertise that allows them to contribute to processes relevant to the organization or its mission. The executive must be constantly aware and careful of board member agendas, whether crafted by individual perspectives or those of an assumed constituency.

Boards with limited financial and policy influence frequently become involved in low-level, service-oriented issues. Although they see these decisions as policy, it is more closely associated with internal management and operational decision-making. This is the case at JTA through two recent items discussed by board members and the executive during the research interviews. First, they described a circumstance where the local retail mall refused to allow JTA shelters and buses on their property. This is generally an operational management issue with staff initiated short-term solutions followed by recommendations of long-term change for board review and approval. Board members quickly became very interested in this new change and were soon suggesting on which street to stop and questioned operational issues of lighting and traffic delays. Board attention to deciding where service should be is clearly a low-level, but important, policy issue; where and how to stop is a management responsibility.

Similar issues arose in a number of other boards within the study. Committee or individual member reviews of routes are focused on where the new route operate, where riders will wait and transfer, what type of bus will be used and who will be impacted positively or negatively by the change. These are all salient issues; however, this is where attention is typically drawn—low-level on street issues. Service reductions or

modification is extremely important to the system and its riders and the Federal Transit Administration even requires public hearings to ensure public input on significant route modifications. On its face, this is a high-level policy, especially when considering new routes and services or worse the reduction or elimination of service. In reality, this is a low-level issue because the high-level policy issues are: Why do you have to cut service? What was done to allow for expansion of service?

A second circumstance described at JTA is bus shelters. The allocation of capital funds for bus shelters could be seen as a high-level issue in the scope of Jackson's small capital budget. A few years ago JTA acquired some used shelters from MATA and more recently money was allocated for new ones. The GM found some similar shelters but due to the prohibitive cost it was decided to find and buy fifteen alternative shelters that fit better in both cost and need. Where things became low-level is when board members became extremely interested in where these shelters would go—what neighborhoods, what routes—to the point that one of the board members approached the public to provide input on where shelters belong. Rather than force the issue of establishing policy such as amenities standards—stops with daily boardings between "X" and "Y" shall receive shelters and those exceeding "Y" shall receive benches—it became an issue of personal preference and low-level input.

The above discussion clearly demonstrates how quickly the focus of low-level board members devolves in low-level policy and service level concerns that are within the scope of managerial authority. The majority of concerns identified by low-level board members are "how, when and where" questions—the administrative and management functions of the organization. Board members should more concerned with

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"what and why" questions, establishing standards, expectations and guidelines for executive management of organizational resources. The item of concern with the three expectations and the extent to which these patterns exist is the final item—will this lead to greater conflict between the executive and board members as agendas misalign and does that cause decreased support for the executive?

Where agenda creates conflict is when the board member's focus is on lower-level issues that deviate from the policy-orientation of the board, such as the management of employees, the implementation of services or when requisite change is in stark contrast to individual preferences. Executives have entirely different perspectives than boards. Executives spend their careers in public transportation and spend their days living and breathing service issues. They develop understandings of how to deliver services, the obstacles to services and how to manage resources—human, mechanical and financial—for the betterment of the system and the city. Board members are distant, have only surface understanding of service delivery and have no idea of the true capabilities of the system or its resources. They gather semi-monthly, sometimes less, to discuss issues and make decisions with less information and less experience.

The conflict is going to emerge because executives make decisions based on the overall system and its long-term success. They do not subdivide loyalties because the system is the sole recipient of the executive and staff's devotion. A manager with 14 million customers a year, even 500,000 customers, cannot pick and choose between neighborhoods, customer groups or service types. All must receive equal attention but when it comes time to make service decisions, the executive allows the facts speak for the service, not the people. This is an entirely different understanding from board members

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who see concerns at a more emotional, personal level instead of purely on ridership and revenue projections. An MTA board member who affirmed the challenge of balancing everybody's needs against budget limitations was directly asked, "If you had to choose between the choice rider and transit dependent rider, who wins?" The response was based on how low the ridership was and how great the need was to try new services. This is the hard choice that most authority board members struggle to make—balancing the opportunity to shift low-performing route resources to high-revenue routes and opportunities. "Usually we give up the choice rider because of density" but park and ride routes can yield higher fares and total revenue with higher passengers per hour and represent a very efficient and effective service. "Ultimately it comes down to an equity issue and a need to protect the underclass, whether perceived or actual."

Executives saw clear opportunities for these differing agendas and perspectives to unfold into conflict. In almost every instance where conflict existed, identified by either boards or executives, the board agenda was focused on low-level items that were either the prerogative of the executive or detracted from the large-scale goals of the system. Where this becomes most problematic is when this devolves into micromanaging such as publicly questioning mechanical problems with buses or directing staff to reassign vehicles. Executives described situations where board members publicly attacked the staff and GM over customer complaints or sought involvement in hiring by participating in interviews. Low-level agendas and board micromanagement eventually consumes the executive and staff as they spend time preparing meaningless reports, implementing changes that serve no purpose or spawn greater problems.

Several executives described where meddling in hiring practices was extremely explosive for the board and executive and detrimental to the authority. Racial motivation was expressed as a common theme surrounding intense conflict over minority hiring or a minority termination, regardless of performance-based decisions and issues. This is an implied, even explicit charge of racism, which is extremely serious and harmful to both the board's functioning and the executive's ability to execute the managerial and administrative needs of the organization. The same issue can occur when the issue is tied to labor practices involving collective bargaining units. Board members overly sensitive to union-related issues may try and persuade (or force) executives to change policies or practices and may try and get involved more one-on-one in disciplinary matters despite the clear managerial authority in personnel matters. Described fallout has been increased media attention, lawsuits and formal complaints from employees, investigations from government agencies, lost time and resources spent defending the executive and organization, infighting among board members, declining morale, fired and resigned GMs, as well as board member resignations, removals and non-reappointment. Meanwhile the business of the organization grinds to a halt or is set back months or years while the organization recovers.

ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Questions

The purpose of the research is to better understand the board-executive relationship in public authorities, specifically those governing public transportation organizations. The academic literature, conceptual arguments and data from board

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members and executives reveals conflict as a byproduct of the absence of high-level

policy opportunity and creates obstacles for system governance through increased

micromanagement. This research's exploration of board composition, agenda

preferences and conflict is focused on three research questions to provide understanding

of what factors impact the board-executive relationship. The three questions are:

1. What are the perceived roles of board members serving on public transportation

    authority?

2. Under what circumstances are public transportation authority board members

    more likely to seek involvement in decision-making that falls under the

    executive's authority?

3. What impact does this encroachment on executive responsibility have on board

    membership support for the executive?

The first question helps to explain board member focus and perceptions, as

displayed in actual and preferred roles of authority responsibility. Simultaneously,

attention is paid to issues of representation and the inclination of board member agendas

toward low-level policy. The second question draws the connection between individual

preferences, decision-making preferences and action and the extent to which this exists

and why. Finally, the answer to the third research question explains the impact of board

members' low-level agendas on governance and the extent these agendas impact board-

executive relationships and support for the executive. Each question is answered below

in light of the expectations evaluated earlier in this chapter in addition to the data

presented in Chapters Three and Four.

The Perceived Roles of Board Members Serving On Public Transportation Authorities

The most important factor impacting the perceived roles of individual board members and the expectations of fellow board members is the basis for appointment. A large number of board members pointed to past professional and board experience as the reason for appointment by the mayor and self-identified a motivation for carrying these reasons forward. They also expected other board members to have the same viewpoint— that backgrounds and experience in certain areas of the community should translate into individual perspectives, preferences and decision-making. Members identifying a higher level of involvement in these ancillary areas held a stronger belief these values and perspectives should be forwarded to authority activity, especially during board discussion and action on executive recommendations. They also felt past experience on boards— community, professional or otherwise—helped to prepare them and the skills and perspectives developed elsewhere contributed to their appointment and beliefs on how boards function.

The second most important factor was why these board members agreed to serve on the authority board—to represent a certain perspective, manifest through their appointment, and represent a certain population. Representation emerged is a unique phenomenon among these public transportation authorities because the need for representation is played out through the perception of the appointer and his or her advisors. The decision that: 1) the board will be representative; 2) who will be represented; and 3) by whom is made with no public input or discussion. It is an odd situation where an elected mayor decides who can best represent a community and generally with no attempt to represent the organization's needs. Representation is

extremely varied and individuals can be devoted to a population of one or one million by choosing to represent the mayor or an entire metropolitan area; however, in most cases the representation of riders was the most important motivating factor for decisions. Board membership was a way to support and give back to the community—a strong feeling of public service toward the public good and a need to reflect community values.

Board members did, however, recognize and sometimes assert a logical limit to representation as a value and the dividends it pays. From the standpoint of public policy development and organizational efficacy, there is no need for proportional representation, whether black, white, rider or non-rider. For example an uneducated, low-income individual disconnected from public policy and processes may statistically represent a distinct and large population of riders but cannot contribute effectively to the public process itself. The result of this type of person could constitute a lack of representation, as this person might not articulate the necessary ideas and issues. It was argued that what is truly needed for representation of these groups is an understanding of wants and needs, not individuals with those wants and needs.

The combination of these two items, reason for appointment and the representation of certain communities, played out in the third perception that boards should reflect the diversity of the city and the people the system serves. Even if board members did not feel they personally or collectively represented expected viewpoints because they were black, disabled or employed in certain fields there was a belief that the board should reflect the community because it shows the city that as many viewpoints as possible are included in the discussion and decision process. All board members felt their board was effective and many felt diverse membership backgrounds and

perspectives drove board and organizational success, as measured by balanced discussion, good group decisions and smooth board and service operation. Many felt their board was particularly good at working together to resolve issues and conflict while bringing this diversity to bear on problems and challenges facing the authority and how those challenges will impact the riders and community.

The next major perspective offered by a large number of board members was the identification of their role as policy maker. They view their role in terms of budget control through approving, setting and balancing the budget and raising revenue in times of financial shortfall. They spoke in high-level terms of funding, budget, financial performance and capital needs but most discussion of formal board powers was drawn toward more routine items. Routine functions included review of financial reports, approval of contracts and routine purchases and participation in discussion and debate over recommendations proffered by executives. Major decisions to fund an operations analysis, add new senior staff positions or increase fares were few and far between. Decisions to cut unproductive route segments are typically budget driven and it is usually and either/or situation. Few articulated any major concerns with the recommendations presented and felt their discussion guided decisions, although these were generally routine items that were evaluated on a case-by-case basis. There was no indication of action items translating into specific steps along a short- or long-term business plan. Boards that utilize a committee structure rely heavily on the committee to review and address financial concerns. In general, board members described their actions and involvement more in terms of review and oversight but perceived a much stronger policy role than exists.

The majority of policy-making described was turned toward low-level, on street service decisions. All of the boards in this study review and approve changes to on street services and these items comprise the remainder of formal board meeting agenda items. The majority of items actually brought before the board are service-oriented changes, such as rerouting of buses, approval of new routes and services in addition to conducting public hearings and asking for reports and information from service related issues. Unlike the committees for budget and financial issues, including facility-oriented committees, most board members felt an obligation to discuss service changes at a board level instead of relying exclusively on the committee for vetting of issues. Once again, much of this is discussion and expression of ideas regarding agenda items. Overall it pertains much more to oversight of services—especially through the review of monthly ridership, concern for customer comments and input and the overall process of listening and voting—most often in support of the recommendation. They generally perceive the discussion and questioning, regardless of the item, as their way to prevent the rubberstamping of executive action.

The informal role of the board was also an important perspective; however, for most board members this was a more individual role and was not discussed in the specific construct of a responsibility. They viewed their professional backgrounds and technical expertise in areas such as financial, legal, management and labor relations to be not only valuable to the authority's formal functioning but also the informal processes and interaction among the members and executive. Board members cited their ability to review reports and information, communicate concerns and provide clarification to fellow members as valuable but placed greater emphasis on their ability to guide

executive decision-making. The perception that members should provide technical or general advice on complex issues and procedures was evident, as was the belief that executives have as much responsibility to seek advice as the members' have to provide direction. Members perceived a high level of board chair and executive interaction as important in addition to increased involvement during high profile or critical processes, such as budget hearings, transit center meetings or political and controversial issues. In these instances board members perceived an obligation to apply political pressure upward or downward, depending on circumstance, for the authority's benefit.

Involvement in Decision-making That Falls Under The Executive's Authority

Board members are more likely to seek involvement in decisions that fall under executive's managerial authority under three main circumstances. First, when the majority of decisions the board is involved in are low-level on street service decisions, and second, when the board member perceives a high level of technical expertise and interest in a particular issue but lacks formal authority for involvement. The third circumstance occurs when board members have vested levels of interest due to a community-based focus (caused by feelings of representation and constituency) but lacks authority for involvement *and* perceives a detrimental impact on that particular community resulting from executive decisions.

The first situation, where boards seek involvement in executive decision-making due to frequent low-level service issues is spurred by several factors. First, as a general rule these is little controversy between a board and executive when there are increased amounts of high-level policy decisions because the board is already involved. High-level decisions are a shared function of the board and executive with final authority resting

with the board. Most often these items are short- and long-term planning and funding strategies that require a team-oriented approach to problem solving. Second, little controversy exists because the most board members have either little interest in the subject or an ability to influence these decisions because of limited technical proficiency and increased time constraints—so long as results do not negatively impact the communities or interests of that board member.

Board members are most interested, at varying degrees, in service-oriented, street-level decisions. The formal duties of the board involve a number of decisions that impact services such as adding and eliminating routes, eliminating unproductive trips, changing bus routing and approving purchases for vehicle and on street amenities (shelters, benches, information racks, etc.). These decisions are conceptually and practically easy to understand, are often tangible in terms of the "where and when" of bus services, represent positive or negative changes to services and invoke customer-oriented perspectives. When mixed with concerns of representation and protection, these issues elicit high levels of interest. It is these decisions that allow boards to have nuts-and-bolts involvement in the complex and dynamic functions of transit operations. These actions allow for important service-related involvement but require only surface-level understanding for action—so long as the decisions are positive, a popular caveat.

These on street decisions are the formal duty and responsibility of the board and members are required to act on them; however, when the low-level, on street issues become the focus of the board rather than high-level policy, devolution sets in and can turn into board encroachment of executive direction rather than the true function of the board—policy-making. This occurs when the vast majority of decisions are service-level

and there is little opportunity for high-level policy related to finances and organizational guidance. Board members feel their duty is to direct these service-related policies and grow increasingly familiar with on street operations. When this familiarity develops the members can feel as though they possess the right and obligation to direct decisions made at the executive level.

AT JTA the board is increasingly involved in routine operational decisions because routine decisions impact finances, such as the meeting to decide to replace an employee on a long-term absence with either part-time help or overtime work. This was also the case at JTA where board members became intimately involved in the style of shelters for purchase (instead of price only), and the preferred locations in addition to the circumstances of a mall's refusal to allow JTA buses on property. These decisions should be almost entirely management decisions because a budget is set and resources are allocated. How an executive manages this is purely his or her discretion under normal circumstances but the board's close association and interest in on street service has created a high-level of familiarity and involvement. This becomes the standard operating procedure of the board and seems to meet the needs of the board and executive.

The second area where board members want intimate involvement with executive decisions is when the topic falls within their area of expertise. The diversity of board members includes a variety of professional backgrounds and experiences and most any board will have a member with some involvement in a policy or management issue. From a professional standpoint, attorneys for example, seek to be involved in contracts issues and potential legal entanglements even when the problems are management-related such as a termination, accident with injury or a contract within the mandatory spending

limits under executive discretion. Those with financial backgrounds will seek

involvement with low-level financial issues such as developing route performance

calculations, minor budget adjustments and renegotiating existing (already board

approved) contracts. There is a near endless list of managerial decisions that touch some

part of the board's expertise in collective bargaining practices, personal management

experiences, large-scale procurement and political involvement. Board diversity, as

described throughout this dissertation, is a common theme and value for appointers,

appointees and executives. There is an inherent expectation that executives will tap this

resource on a regular basis, even when the executive feels it is not necessary.

Another area where this expertise unfolds is not in the individual's outside

expertise or experience but their internal involvement in authority functions over time. A

number of boards have no term limits or the terms are staggered such that they take a

one- or two-year break from service and are reappointed at the next vacancy. These

board members develop considerable experience through many years of service and

become personally invested and devoted to the system. They have greater desire to help

select new buses after experiencing years of outdated equipment or become excited when

new service is launched and want involvement in the details of how a new innovative

service will work. When they are skeptical of a new initiative, they want to know *exactly*

who will do what and how. They need to develop their own comfort level in how new

programs will be implemented. Sometimes they see new products or ideas they think

would help the system, hoping to contribute to the system's safety or quality. A board

member who served on a particular committee during the high water mark of service

expansion or facility growth and was involved in the street-level details *at that time* may

always have an affinity for the service or a staff person that worked closely with them. These circumstances are especially true if the member served as chair at some point because board members and executives both described an increased level of involvement in managerial issues and a closer working relationship between chairs and executives.

The final instance where board members seek involvement in executive authority is when a board member with a strong community-based focus perceives a negative effect on a specific community, as caused by executive decision-making. Most often this occurs when a board member sees his or her appointment as an implied responsibility to represent a specific population they view as a constituency but with no formal right to be involved. This can also happen when the board member questions decisions and seeks involvement but the member's preferences are dismissed or the member is excluded from processes. These individuals see service changes and internal policies from a street-level perspective and board members, such as ministers, community volunteers or those employed in social service-focused organizations that work directly with, or are active among, low-income or marginalized populations have a strong connection with their respective communities. Members with connections to disenfranchised communities act as liaisons between political and bureaucratic processes and those they feel they serve and represent. Board members with this professional or volunteer background maintain personal involvement, develop more social-based relationships and become more supportive of individual needs via this direct contact. As a result, opportunities for executive decisions with potential to hurt these populations are of extreme interest for these board members.

This preference is not exclusive to marginalized populations. Some board members are riders by choice or circumstance and see a direct connection between executive decision-making and the service they receive. They think certain drivers need discipline or retraining, some stops should be relocated to more convenient locations and think the route should line-up with more buses so that layovers are shorter. They feel attention to maintenance is lacking because the bus they rode yesterday was hot or because the passengers complained their bus broke down on the route twice last week. These are important, service-related issues but are areas of concern for executives and their staff. A large number of business owners and organizations benefit considerably from public transportation services. Convention and tourism districts may be hurt by an executive's redirection of vehicles to other service areas or a reduced emphasis on service marketing or street-level supervision. Medical centers and industrial districts often rely heavily on entry-level workers and become increasingly concerned with executive approach to service development or attempt to steer resources to those routes. Board members from those respective communities may become the point of contact for employers who have problems with route timing or on time performance, offering suggestions for how service should be organized to meet those unique needs and preferences. Universities entering into operational service agreements with the authority may seek greater involvement in managing service quality due to concerns over student complaints or administrative pressure. They may demand greater involvement in resource allocation and service development polices, going as far demanding personnel involvement and vehicle use.

In many regards, the above areas have some level of board applicability because the board is ultimately responsible for service. On street administrative and management decisions are the domain of the executive but it is understandable how some board members see the connection between on street service and their involvement—even when it is an executive responsibility. The board should focus more on holding the executive accountable for on street issues but the service/involvement connection is there, although sometimes it is a stretch. Where this becomes far more difficult for board members to justify is in areas of personnel management. Personnel issues can be an area where board members desire greater involvement in executive decision-making. Most members know, however, that this is prohibited due to the clear distinction between board and executive responsibility. Controversial hiring, promotion or termination may capture board member attention if there is a perception of favoritism, racism or mistreatment. They may feel a particular employee was overlooked for promotion and deserves the job, perceive the executive is allowing certain difficult and abrasive personalities to drive away competent staff or the executive allows too much freedom for a supervisor or staff member. Sometimes the focus is on employee morale due to new stringent policies to curtail excessive absenteeism, preventable accidents or a new director who is reportedly mistreating front-line drivers and supervisors.

The Impact of Encroachment On Board Membership Support for the Executive

This research indicates that board member encroachment on executive responsibility has two distinct effects on support levels for the executive from board members: 1) relatively little impact; and 2) severe and devastating impact, although each occurs for separate reasons. First, instances where there is little impact on executive

support from encroachment is the result of a very diverse mix of members with varying

individual preferences and agendas that tend to play out one-on-one and in isolated

circumstances. It is rare to have multiple members expressing desire to become involved

in a single area of executive decision-making. The encroachment is more member-

executive based than board-executive based. Second, these individual and unique

circumstances rarely boil over into member-member interaction or formal board decision-

making because the situations are usually limited to issues that fall outside board

responsibility, therefore committee and board meeting agendas rarely include issues

surrounding these controversial topics.

Encroachment on executive responsibility is typically expressed by board

members as a desire for involvement in executive decision-making processes, not an

actual involvement in decisions. The trend toward declining board member support for

the executive is mitigated by the third factor influencing the level of encroachment on

executive responsibility—board member restraint. A considerable number of board

members with an inclination toward involvement in management and administrative

decisions were tempered by their own recognition of the proper limits of board and

executive authority. Even when these lines were crossed, executive resistance and

assertion of managerial authority was respected and the board members appropriately

retreated. The fourth factor that helps to control board member incursion is a the watch

of a strong board chair that recognizes the line of demarcation, especially when the chair

is well informed of these issues and has established a comfort level with the executive's

authority and approach. Strong, well-informed chairs can calm down excited or

concerned board members; however, reliance on the chair is equally dangerous for

executives if the chair is the one seeking involvement. Executives that allow board chairs into management circles when it is helpful have a hard time excluding them when it is harmful.

Fifth, the success of the executive and the system generally speaks for itself. A successful transit system with growing ridership and revenue, a steady stream of updated equipment and technology, positive employee relations and support from local political leaders is extremely difficult to ignore when a board member feels the executive's decision-making is ineffective or seeks involvement. Even when concerns exist, the success of the system is usually attributable to the executive, just as failing system can be blamed on them. Even when views clash the executive commands higher levels of respect for their position during times of organizational growth and success. Finally, executives have a natural tendency to include board members in managerial decisions either ad hoc or through routine processes. Some executives have established higher thresholds for board involvement in executive decision-making, utilizing the board as a "kitchen cabinet" but with considerably more voice and even voting authority on marketing and procurement committees. This keeps the board informed and engaged while helping them to understand the rationale behind executive judgment so when managerial decisions are made there is less controversy and questioning.

Even when the desire for encroachment is controlled by the above factors, it still occurs and is highly problematic, if not devastating, to the executive and the authority on several levels. First, attention is directed from organizational policy and guidance even if the undercurrent never goes beyond one-on-one, member-executive relationships. An executive must dedicate the time, energy and effort to defend their case and risk annoying

(at best) or offending and alienating the member. Meanwhile, efforts required for managing the budget and system are impaired, as is the progressive and innovative leadership expected from an executive of a public authority.

Second, board encroachment can quickly turn from involvement in an isolated issue to micromanagement, which becomes conceptually lose-lose for the executive. Allowing involvement in one area may encourage micromanagement from that member or others in a multitude of other areas. When this occurs, executive authority becomes ineffective and all decisions are challenged, both internally and externally and regardless of circumstance. This has potential to devolve into more widespread concern for executive effectiveness. A board that directs executive work, rather than guide organizational mission and policy has spiraled outside the expected norms of the authority structure and a group approach to management develops rather than an individual executive accountable to a board of governors—the essence of quasi-governments, especially the public authority structure.

Third, encroachment and support levels are troublesome when the executive must go beyond balancing the needs of two masters—a parent government and a board. When board encroachment occurs the executive's masters quickly multiply, especially if there are multiple board members with divergent preferences. Board member involvement in one decision may negatively impact the preferences of another member, requiring the executive to involve the other members and balance the repercussions across multiple communities or individual preferences. When executive decisions are fact-based and delivered by an executive with neutral competence and no alliances, these decisions are more respected—even if there are negative consequences for members' communities.

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Ultimately, the content of the encroachment and the board member's assertion for involvement can damage the relationship and possibly destroy it. Relatively routine issues of dirty shelters, a preference for certain types of buses and overall employee morale are considerably minor when compared to overt demands placed on executives related to personnel management and organizational operation. Constant questioning and demands for board involvement in authority management undermines staff respect for the member and overall board, reduces board member support for individual and collective staff members, and ultimately creates thinly veiled suspicion, distrust and misrepresentation of concerns and issues among the board, staff and executive.

Incursions driven by value judgments, even tinged with harmful sentiments such as sexism, racism or nepotism—either direct or reverse—can call into question the executive and board member's character and play out in political arenas. Mayoral and council intervention in authority business is detrimental to organizational functioning and can reduce external funding and support for key measures. It creates a more partisan authority that cannot be divorced from political wills and may force the executive from the system and the member from the board. This instability and uncertainty permeates the board, organization and parent government and can leave a scent of controversy and infighting that reduces the willingness of members to continue serving and further dilutes the pool of new individuals willing to serve on what is perceived as a misanthropic organization. Meanwhile, controversy makes it difficult for the authority to recruit future skilled executives, as they are hesitant to risk their careers and experience potential professional and personal misery.

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CONCLUSION

When evaluating the areas of developing funding, financial management and capital planning there is clearly a connection between the ability to participate in and impact these process and distinctly different board activity among the varying authorities within the study. Boards with more financial authority had a much higher level of policy-making involvement and an ability to create opportunities to further organizational goals. The research shows that as financial authority decreases there is a much greater inclination for lower-level players to fill the seats on public authority boards and a resulting emphasis on low-level, on street service policy issues. The less financial influence the board holds, the more attention is paid to on street services and organizational operations, most of which are implementation and management-oriented, both the general domain of the authority executive.

What this study did not uncover from interviews was a pattern of higher levels of conflict and disagreement among executives and lower-level players expected from the lower-level players and their service-level agendas. Chapters Three and Four presented executive approach to managing the board-executive relationships and board perspectives on representation, political prowess and decision-making; however; the primary determination of conflict is the authority's overall success. When organizational direction in policy, management and service delivery meet the needs and preferences of the vast majority of board members, there is a much greater level of support for the executive and an affirmation of executive effectiveness. While this study did not reveal a high level of conflict among these systems, several board members and executives described very difficult periods in the organizations' history to display how conflict can

develop across a variety of financial and non-financial issues falling within and outside of the normal expectations of board and executive responsibility. While this research did not provide evidence of an automatically higher level of conflict between executives and lower level board members, interviews did reflect low-level players' increased interest in low-level policy and non-policy issue areas that encroach on executive responsibility.

The answering of the research questions reveal that board members identified their roles and responsibilities as heavily influenced by the reason for their individual appointments and the representation of certain perspectives and populations. There was a clear perception that these factors should translate to authority decision-making and organizational direction. Additionally, the diversity of boards plays a significant factor in authority policy, as decisions are a reflection of community values and make-up; however, policy was typically drawn toward service-related decisions. In addition to these issues, board members saw themselves as formal and informal advisors for the executive, brining their experience and expertise to bear for the benefit of the executive and the authority. Boards, however, have a tendency to encroach on executive decision-making when on street policy is the board's main role, when the member has high level of technical expertise and when members have vested levels of interest due to a community-based interest but lacks authority for involvement. Yet, ultimately this encroachment has two extremes—little impact or devastating impact, depending on the issues and how they are managed.

The analysis of the expectations and research questions have provided considerable insight in to how board members perceive their roles and how this impacts board-executive relationships, as examined through conflict and decision-making.

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However, from this discussion surfaces a typology of public transportation authority board member preferences based on the actual and preferred roles of members and how individual preferences and focus manifest through conflict and support. Chapter Six explicates this typology in the framework of the dichotomy-duality model and conceptually applies the model and the typology to the public authority structure.

CHAPTER VI

TOWARD A TYPOLOGY OF BOARD MEMBERS

INTRODUCTION

This exploration of board-executive relationships in public transportation authorities has focused not on personality and interaction but rather structural elements of public authorities, the impact of parent governments, political environments, community norms and organizational decision-making. What has surfaced is the understanding that executives have similar perspectives and opinions regarding board roles, responsibilities, preferences and behavior with a strong focus on managing board relationships in addition authority business. What is also apparent is a diversity of board member perspectives and opinions toward these same roles and responsibilities, political power and organizational effectiveness plus personal preferences toward policy and decision-making.

Despite the diversity, the research and analysis has shown that there are clear similarities among board members. This allows board members to be grouped according to preferences and behavior within a typological framework to better understand the different kinds of board members comprising public transportation authority boards. The typology allows board members to be located in conceptual "boxes" differentiating high-level and low-level board perspectives while outlining policy preferences and understanding of board and executive interaction along the mission-policy-administration-management framework. This chapter presents the typology by describing the different board members, identified from the data and analysis, within the

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frame of James Svara's dichotomy-duality model. Chapter Six concludes with an

evaluation of this typology in regard to how each main type of board member—policy-,

advisory- and community-oriented—presents a different set of challenges to a positive

and effective board-executive relationship.

TYPOLOGY OF BOARD MEMBER PRFERENCES AND BEHAVIOR

Looking back on executive and board member opinions and attitudes towards

policy, representation and decision-making and the combined impact on the board-

executive relationship there are several emergent themes that allow for more broad-based

conclusions regarding board member preferences and perspectives. First, boards are

internally varied by design and this variation generally attempts to reflect the values and

norms of the community, the parent government and the needs of the organization.

Second, the experiences and subsequent perspectives brought to the authority board table

are as diverse as the members who bring them. Third, despite this variation and diversity

these public transportation authorities parallel one another in important areas such as

organizational functions, formal board and executive responsibilities and most important

how executives and board members view their roles, responsibilities and power. The

value of these similarities and differences is the ability to work toward greater

understanding of preferred and actual roles of members and to develop more specific

descriptions of board member behavior and preferences. This is an important first step

with the potential to lead to generalization and application of the concepts to the

population of public authority boards.

Through this research and analysis a typology of three distinct types of board members developed, further subdivided into six subtypes based on the preferences and perceptions of board member responsibilities. This typology speaks to the board members' understanding of the role of the board and what is expected of them as board members in addition to how this impacts decision-making. The typology is organized around the two themes of orientation and focus, with orientation describing board member outlook and preferences on board roles and responsibilities while focus describes the scope of interest in the scheme of these roles and responsibilities. *Orientation* is defined along three separate areas: policy-orientation, advisory-orientation and community-orientation. And the additional conceptual layer of board member *focus* is examined in terms of broad or narrow focus to describe the breadth and depth of individual board member interest in policy, advisory and community issues. This draws greater distinction between board member types to create a typology along the two lines of orientation and focus to create six distinct categories of board members: policy-oriented, broad focus; policy-oriented, narrow focus; advisory-oriented, broad focus; advisory-oriented, narrow focus; community-oriented, broad focus; and community-oriented, narrow focus.

Policy-Oriented Board Members: Broad and Narrow Focus

The first type of board member identified is the policy-oriented board member, briefly described a member who recognizes, articulates and maintains the distinction between executive and board authority and responsibility and preserves a firm and reasonable line of demarcation between these functions within the context of the board-executive relationship. The policy-oriented board member is conceptually divided into

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two sub-types, based on the broad or narrow focus of the member as described below. The board members are interested in policy development at financial, oversight and planning levels, indicate a propensity toward information-based decision-making and place tremendous value on key issues of financial management, structural responsibility and accountability for the board and executive. These individuals comprise an ideal-type group of board members within the traditional conceptualization of the public authority structure.

Policy-oriented board members are unique in that appointments are typically motivated by efforts to draw greater influence for the authority, both internally and externally, and are frequently tied to prior experience in high-level public and private sector organizations with extensive service on other high-level policy and civic boards. Selection is based on achieving greater stature or expertise for the authority and members typically view their role on the board as voting and acting on behalf of either the parent government, the authority, the entire city (or region) or some permutation of the three. Most of these board members draw no distinctions between the benefit of services for riders and non-riders, identifying public transportation as a critical element of a functioning urban area.

These individuals identify their duties and responsibilities as policy-making for the authority and elucidate this through concentration on financial and strategic policy direction for the organization with an emphasis on clear lines of board and executive authority. Policy direction, especially in financial terms, is emphasized on larger picture issues of funding streams but with specific measures to generate revenue or establish minimum standards of performance for resource allocation, especially for on street

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services. Attention is on concepts such as performance measures for evaluating on street

services along lines of efficiency, effectiveness and financial viability; establishment of

business and financial plans to balance interests between revenue intake and ridership

growth—both very important to the authority; and policies to meet the needs of users in

terms of service area, service type and cost. This group's description of policy-making is

less about approving recommendations but initiating short- and long-term planning with

priority on developing strategy for garnering resource support for innovation and

implementation.

Policy-oriented board members view their role as setting direction followed by

review. Their expectation as board members is to remain aware and engaged in the

business elements of the authority with an eye toward oversight of board and executive

decisions. To that end they expect to be informed of high-level policy issues and the

associated internal and external political maneuvering and motivations while assisting in

key areas when necessary. They see themselves as holding policy-making power not

only for the authority but influencing decisions outside the authority when possible.

They exert higher level of influence and power, especially when joined collectively on a

single board and with a strong executive at a burgeoning system.

While many board members identified the importance of maintaining distance

from executives' managerial authority, policy-oriented board members emphasized the

unhealthy result of this type of involvement. Recognizing the detrimental impact of

micromanaging they make concerted efforts to keep attention on policy development and

issues brought before (and initiated) by the board. Issues pertaining to personnel, internal

organization and policy execution are tempered by this understanding as well as

cognizance that professional staff possesses expertise and experience to make effective decisions to operate service and functionally run the organization. Beyond maintaining distance in managerial authority there is understanding of, and some support for, a strong executive that not only prepares and presents recommendations but plays a major, if not lead role in crafting policy and direction for the board as well. The executive is viewed as the organizational leader with experience and expertise combining to shape direction in conjunction with the board. Policy-oriented members have a strong reliance and respect for executive and staff level policy development but assert their power to ensure the information available is complete and accurate such that members can make effective decisions and uphold their responsibility and duty to the authority and parent government.

Focus draws an additional level of distinction between board members, especially in regards to board members that have either a broad or narrow policy focus. Policy-oriented board members rarely identify a specific goal or objective as motivation for joining or remaining on the board; however, they have areas of interest and expertise regarding the scope of issues they are responsible for pursuing. Broad focused board members typically have an interest in overall organizational mission and policy and tie together the issues of policy development, oversight and accountability. They have no specific interest in only finance, only planning or only performance measurement. They see connections between these diverse areas and approach the overall development of the authority through the understanding of the broad interrelation between funding, system improvement and accountability. Narrow focused, policy-oriented board members have a narrower scope of interest, focusing predominantly on budgetary and financial process,

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on street service standards and quality assurance assessments, transportation technology procurement or political inclinations toward wielding power and influence within given circles.

Of the three clusters of board members, policy-oriented members often have more broad-based interests because they have no distinct representational interests or alliances with certain segments of the community. They possess a much higher level of policy ability and interest and see interrelation between multiple issues making it difficult to segment their policy orientation into narrow focus or small spheres of policy. Overall, policy-oriented board members are close allies of the executive because they have an understanding of the mission and policy expectations of the board and execute the responsibilities effectively combined with the executive involvement in the same. Support for the executive level is generally very high and these members feel the executive is an effective executive of the transportation system and that the board is a highly effective functional unit.

Advisory-Oriented Board Members: Broad and Narrow Focus

Advisory-oriented board members represent the third and fourth type of board members. Just as the policy-oriented board member, articulates the distinction between executive and board authority and responsibility the advisory board members seeks a more active role in executive decision-making by providing advice and counsel to the executive. Unlike the firm line of demarcation established by policy-oriented board members, advisory members see themselves as less developing policy and setting organizational direction and more advising the executive as he or she crafts mission and policy for board approval. Advisory-oriented members are predominantly interested in

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oversight of policy development and implementation with more reactive and surface-level involvement in policy-making. Emphasis is on the level of confidence in the executive's approach, as determined by the executive's incorporation of board member advice and perspective. They view policy recommendation as a reflection of board values, especially their own personal perspectives, and place a much lower level of emphasis on involvement in financial and planning process. While valuable for the advice they proffer, they have a much lower level of influence inside and outside the authority resulting from their own inclinations for decreased policy formulation.

Advisory-oriented members are appointed for the same general reasons as policy-oriented members—stature and expertise—but with a decreased emphasis on power and influence. Most advisory board members have involvement in civic or community interest boards and have established themselves as mid-to-low-level players with an interest in community issues. They are usually selected because they offer a level of technical expertise in a professional area germane to the authority's function such as law, engineering, architecture or executive management. Additionally, these members do not have specialized interest in any particular segment of the community but place greater emphasis on the protection of service for riders, as they view themselves as providing technical guidance and advice for improving existing services and developing new ones.

Members with an advisory orientation see their policy-making role as involvement through ad hoc response to single initiatives or continuous advice on a more long-term project launched by executives. Advisory-oriented members have interest in budgetary, planning and strategic direction but interest is usually limited to their primary areas of expertise or applying that expertise across a wider range of issues. There is a

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greater emphasis on service delivery in community-wide terms and view

recommendation through the lens of what they think is good for authority and good for

the city—especially the ridership. They have a much greater tendency to ask questions

about service-level recommendations than policy-oriented members, especially when

those recommendations involve more tangible issues of service levels, routing and

vehicle procurement. Involvement in financial issues is typically post-development such

as after budget approval by the parent government or after contracts have been negotiated

and presented. They offer perspective and advice at a surface level and are much more

reliant on staff and executive professionalism, often deferring to their expertise and

experience. New staff initiatives for more innovative services are met with some

resistance primarily due to a lack of understanding of the service and an unwillingness to

take risks. If they have comfort with staff ability to execute changes and see nominal

effect, either positive or negative, they are often neutral to the recommendation and will

offer advice and follow the tendencies of the rest of the board. New measures they view

as very positive but are met with resistance by non-advisory members may also sway

their vote, as they have offered their advice and perspective but have no stake in either

the policy or its impact.

Overall, advisory-oriented members see their role as asking questions, making

sure varying perspectives have been considered and then relying on the will of the

majority to guide decisions. Their expectation as board members is to be kept abreast of

a larger variety of non-policy issues and see information and awareness as oversight.

They often feel their attention to detailed reports is important but not necessary and are

looking more at the bottom line: Are we on budget? Is ridership up? Will the new buses

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be here on time? They have interest in the answers but have little interest in the factors that have created the situation; they are interested in the short version with no real proclivity to change processes. They are reactive rather than proactive and emphasis is on oversight and making sure the executive is aware of issues important to the board and its individual members. Accountability is important but awareness and limited oversight is the general interest. Advisory-oriented members expect to be informed of high- and mid-level policy issues but desire a reduced level of involvement in crafting the policy or ensuring implementation. They see limited policy-making power and opportunity and only cursory influence over decisions from outside the authority, recognizing their limited political influence.

Board members with an advisory orientation describe a greater distinction between board authority and executive authority and want little, if any, involvement in managerial decisions but seek greater awareness of these decisions. They feel their oversight extends beyond ridership and revenue but how the organization is managed. Insights into operational decision-making increase understanding and comfort levels with executive recommendations for policy. When executive decisions involve an area of expertise the board members possesses, such as law or engineering, there is an even greater expectation of inclusion for purposes of advice and counsel and some basic level of explanation regarding the final decision. Advisory-oriented members rarely seek or expect involvement in the process but are outcome oriented, especially in controversial matters of staffing decisions or high profile events. They respect the decisions, even when disagreeing, and recognize the inherent right of the executive to manage the organization and make decisions. They see themselves as a "kitchen cabinet"—a group

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of advisors but with "final authority" on these matters resting with the executive, so long as he or she listens to what is said. These members do not place great emphasis on a single subgroup of the city population or riders because their attention is turned to technical guidance on transportation issues that impact the whole system. These advisory-oriented board members do not frequently identify a specific goal or objective for serving on the authority but do see themselves as bringing an area of expertise to the table. Once again, it is a function of their strong desire to provide guidance and advice, mostly one-one-one to the executive in these matters. Where advisory-oriented board members separate is their focus. As explained above, these members have either single-issue interest on some authority activities and policy or apply this expertise on a variety of topics. This helps to clarify differences between narrow and broad focused advisory leaning members.

Broad focused members apply expertise ad hoc to single interest areas as well as overall issues that come across the executive's desk that might warrant their involvement or proficiency. They do have detailed levels of involvement on some areas but because attention is more widespread they have a decreased tendency to drill down into the minutiae surrounding most issues and view authority business from a global lens of their own professional technical understandings and experience. They apply their interest to nearly all issues, not in the sense of micromanagement but as advice. They hold greater expectations of awareness on not only high-level issues but also mid-level and some lower-level issues in order to provide perspective on almost any item before the board. Narrow focused board members, especially in areas of finance, engineering and architecture, seek much greater involvement in their areas of expertise and less on the

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overall scheme of the authority. For example, budgetary struggles or financial oversight

might be the domain of a member who served as a finance director for a public agency or

is an accountant. They might seek and obtain more active roles in committees and work

sessions.   They have a much greater interest in single areas and work far more closely

with the executive to provide increased oversight and advice in these areas on behalf of

the board and for the benefit of the executive. They connect oversight with advice on

these important issues and place considerable attention on the areas of process and result.

Unlike broad focused members, narrow focused board members have a tremendous level

of interest and desire increased detail in a single area without trying to make every

situation fit their interest and expertise. For a narrow focused board member, if it falls

within their narrow area of interest, they are involved. Otherwise they defer to other

board members or the executive.

Advisory-oriented board members share high levels of executive support with

policy-oriented board members and also have strong allegiance to the executive,

especially when they see their fingerprints on policy and management decisions.   They

are typically very supportive of the executive and when support is lacking this is usually

tied to disagreement over single policy issues within that board member's narrow policy

interest. When the board member has more broad-based focus, the conflict reduces

because the areas of disagreement are less intensified instead of within single-interest

area.

Community-Oriented Board Members: Broad and Narrow Focus

The final types of board members identified within this study are community-

oriented members, also divided along lines of broad and narrow focus. What best

differentiates these board members from all others is representation as a core value with a very strong connection to a distinct and specialized community. This is opposed to the policy and advisory approaches that slant toward high-level policy-making and political influence with reliance on technical expertise for and oversight of the overarching system goals. Community-oriented board members have interests in policy and oversight and offering expertise but the context of representation and connection to a specialized community heavily colors their perspectives and preferences. It is this community orientation that presents itself mostly in narrow focused board members but exists strongly in broad focused members as well. Community-oriented board members are interested almost exclusively with on street services and organizational management, as these are the tangible aspects of authority business. Policy-making, oversight and mid-course correction are means processes whereas the output and impact of these functions are ends processes, rolled out through on street services planned by staff, delivered by employees and received by customers. It is within these ends processes that community-oriented board members place their emphasis.

Community-oriented board members feel their appointments are based on representation of a particular community or group. These board members feel they are voting and acting on behalf of a segment of the community that may include a large group of disconnected individuals, a smaller group of individuals connected by common descriptive or circumstantial factors, special interest organizations and agencies or large community institutions. Their appointment is based on an ability to connect with an easily identifiable, particular group and the need (either implied or direct) to represent certain perspectives and opinions on the authority board. It is a connection to and activity

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among such a group that places a board member within this typological box. These appointees see a direct connection between decisions of the authority and the impact on this representational group and in public transportation these board members can be extremely diverse depending on the community.

The board members identify their appointment and representation of a community as their primary responsibility with participation in policy-making, oversight and decision-making. Like other board members, they have political influence and technical expertise but with a greater variety than among policy-oriented and advisory-oriented members. Policy and advisory board member influence is predominantly upward with closer political ties to elected officials, business leaders and local high-level players. Community level board members have a tendency to downward influence, especially with the population they are representing. Political ties to the mayor exist for community-oriented board members but are negated by all appointees having similar relationships.

Like other types of board members, community-oriented members have professional backgrounds with technical expertise valuable to the authority board and executive but this is typically related to backgrounds in fields such as ministry, volunteerism and advocacy, collective bargaining, and social services. Most often these professions are with organizations that work directly with or are active among low-income, marginalized or disadvantaged populations and the members have strong connections with these respective communities. These professions have a clear connection to disenfranchised communities and act as liaisons between the political and bureaucratic process and those they feel they serve and represent. Board members with

this professional or volunteer background maintain personal involvement, have increased

social interaction and become more supportive of individual needs via this direct contact.

They have a tendency to view policy and process through the eyes of their community.

Most unique about board members serving these communities is a feeling that they

provide voice and protection to the disenfranchised populations of the city.

Community-oriented members are not exclusive to these professions and

backgrounds. Business owners, university administrators and public organization

executives serving on authority board are frequently appointed to represent groups or

institutions because they offer unique business perspectives or because they are major

forces in the local community. In the case of a university administrator, especially in a

city with a major university, there are considerable needs for service for students, faculty,

staff, support workers and the ability to connect them throughout and off campus. This

diverse collection of members identifies policy-making and oversight as their two most

important responsibilities; however, the policy and oversight lean toward service-level

issues.

Policy direction on big-picture issues of funding streams and route performance

standards are typically of lower priority and funding is viewed as extremely important

primarily because it is the means by which service can be delivered. Increased budget

allocations from parent governments and state or federal agencies are not viewed from

the perspective of grant expiration dates or development of replacement funding—it is

simply a question of is there enough money to keep service on the street? These board

members rarely apply pressure to council members or mayors to increase budget

requests, often citing limited personal influence or an inability to garner strong and vocal

grass roots support. Policy preferences tend to relate more to how the recommendations impact the community the member is representing. The majority of policy areas where they seek involvement through committees and work sessions relate strongly to service development and marketing committees. Questions regarding revenue and expenditures are less frequently raised unless it is an area of expertise because community-oriented members often lack interest or knowledge in the complex financial procedures and focus predominantly on ridership performance. Oversight is usually couched in terms a basic review of ridership and questioning is geared why a route's ridership is considerably up or down, almost with a suspicion of what is happening on street to grow or curtail customer use.

Community-oriented board members often view their role as an obligation to act on policy and provide advice and counsel—just as other board members—but with the intent and voice of those they represent, whether overtly or covertly. This attention to service issues is predominantly reactive, reviewing proposals that may add, enhance, reduce or eliminate services entirely within the lens of how this affects their community. Special attention is paid to user and community perspectives and concerns are voiced on behalf of the rider—so long as it is valid—no matter how low-level the concern and regardless of the overarching mission or agenda of the board or the executive. Community-oriented board members are clearly different in their interests and attention—and potentially their decision-making because they identify a direct connection between policy and users.

Unlike the descriptions of policy-oriented members who are concerned with information on high-level policy and highly controversial issues or the advisory-oriented

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members who want information on high- and mid-level issues along with controversy, the community-oriented board members usually want to be informed of high-, mid- and low-level issues plus the controversial items. This is in spite of limited involvement in high-level policy due to an inability to influence issues and generally little interest in the routine mid-level issues; meanwhile the threshold for what is deemed controversial is much lower for this group than for other types of members. The reason for this expectation and desire for increased awareness is the board member's role of a conduit and the perceived need to have their ear to the ground within the community and their finger on the pulse of the authority. They simply expect to be more informed on an increased number of issues.

This increased expectation for awareness and involvement can go beyond issues of policy and service. Representation as a perspective and core value may yield the belief, and inherent obligation, to question issues regardless of topic, including decisions falling under executive authority. There is seemingly less respect for strong executive management and administrative authority, although community-oriented board members describe an understanding of both board and executive roles and the powers and rights of each. This understanding only extends so far as executive decisions do not negatively impact the board member's community, which increases desire for both awareness and involvement. This can become particularly tenuous when executive decisions are in process (especially internal management of resources and personnel) and the board seeks involvement and control over outcomes. This micromanagement undermines the board-executive lines of authority, although the community-oriented board sees this as an extension of their roles and responsibilities.

The community-orientation of board members is also divisible into the subgroups of broad and narrow focus. Most community-oriented board members identify a specific goal or objective as a reason for serving on the authority board. These narrow focused members usually cite their attention to one of three groups: passengers, especially transit dependent populations; employees, especially front line employees most often in the collective bargaining unit; and the organization they are closely associated with and were appointed to represent. Issues are closely tied to the community they represent and serve, such as a low-income neighborhoods or community associations near the core of the urban center for which they are a leader, either formally or informally. As described, these are usually service specific issues that relate to low-level policy approval of route changes, service reductions or reallocations to more productive and revenue-friendly routes. They are also oriented to internal organization and management decisions to allocate personnel or resources.

Votes are not based on revenue projections or growing ridership but rather how decisions impact their respective communities. When recommendations do not impact their specific communities, individual members remain sympathetic to other board concerns or with customers who may be impacted, whether or not the impact is real—only possible. Broad focused board members typically have the same general perspective as narrow focused board members but lack a specific community or allegiance to a policy. Emphasis is on low-level issues, almost always service related, with opinions, questions and votes forming "on-the-fly" and easily steered by concerns of other members.

With community-oriented board members, representational interests or alliances among certain segments may impact the support levels for the executive. The disconnect between community-oriented board members and their ability to develop and influence high-level policy, which becomes the focus and attention of the executives, prevents the close working relationships with executives. When services are functioning well, the organization is successful and decisions have limited or no negative impact on the community, then the executive is viewed as effective and support for the executive is usually strong. Board members do realize there are limits to funding for services and understand hard decisions must be made; however, there is usually considerable concern and emotional hand wringing over these decisions. Even then support remains strong—at least until decisions effect only very narrow portions of the community and call into question the executive's decisions.

Variations on the Typology

In a number of cases there were board members who were clearly torn between two different orientations: community/advisory-orientation and advisory/policy-orientation. In each of these instances, the primary orientation of the board member is identified in the first descriptor—community/advisory is community first and advisory/policy is advisory first. Overall, these board members numbered very few but clearly articulated two very strong viewpoints that fit within two categories of the typology. This was caused by one or more of the following factors: 1) board leadership positions; 2) extended service on the authority board; 3) intensified service on the authority board; and 4) large numbers of a particular type of member on the authority board.

In the first instance, a number of board members described a much higher level of awareness of mission and policy issues and greater understanding of the lines of responsibility for the board and executive after serving as chair or vice chair on the authority. As explained by board members and executives, the chair position has a much higher level of interaction with the executive and develops greater awareness of issues. They becomes very protective of the executive and board responsibilities as they referee board and executive concerns while maintaining the effective business of the board including meetings, committees, acclimating new appointees and communicating with elected officials and local leaders on a very wide variety of issues. They are much more in tune with financial and managerial issues and develop a greater understanding of operational and financial decisions and cannot help but be educated by the process. Through their experiences they become better board members and if not already a policy-oriented member are naturally transformed toward that role.

The second and third factors that transition board members are very closely connected and follow the same trend as described above. The longer board members serve the more experience they gain. For example, an advisory-oriented member that is on their tenth budget cycle is much more aware of process and may seek involvement in an areas they couldn't have participated in years ago. They still have advisory inclinations but have developed enough financial acumen to get their hands dirty and guide decisions regarding capital planning and long-term strategy. Community-oriented board members with long tenure have been presented with the harsh economic realities of public funding. Board members who joined to try and develop new services soon realize that services are expensive to deliver from an operating cost, vehicle replacement funds

sometimes come at a trickle and even when grants are available the parent governments have limited funds and are often unwilling to provide match money—$200,000 in grant match funds are difficult to provide even when $800,000 is available from the federal government and will only net four new buses.

Over time boards see just about every issue brought before them and the longer they serve the more they understand—budget crises will force service cuts, managers will implement originally unpopular but very successful services and staff recommendations will seem to turn out fine. The same can be true for a board member who becomes very active an a new project, such as helping pass a referendum, chairing a committee for a new downtown parking garage or a complete renovation of an older facility. The intense working relationship required to make a project successful allows the board member tremendous insight into organizational operation, teaches the board members the complexities of funding mechanisms and exposes them to the obstacles of service delivery. They gain greater appreciation for the challenges managers face and become more understanding of the board's proper roles and responsibilities.

Finally, who surrounds an individual member has a tremendous impact on how members act and what they learn. An advisory- or community-oriented member on a board made up of policy-oriented members will be brought along for the ride in board business. A strong chair with a no nonsense board will have little patience or room for a board member that is constantly a few steps behind or is not focused on the proper business of the authority. Over time they conform by the will of the majority but more often they grown in terms of understanding the responsibilities and expectations. As long as the executive and fellow members show genuine concern and listen to what the

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member has to say they become satisfied with the process and an active and valuable participant in the process.

THE TYPOLOGY AND THE DICHOTOMY-DUALITY MODEL

Adapting and Refining the Dichotomy-Duality Model

While this typology is extremely valuable for understanding the different types of members that make up public transportation authority boards, the value of this typology is the understanding the types in relation to the mission-policy-administration-management functions presented within Svara's dichotomy-duality model. Chapter One's literature review identified James Svara's dichotomy-duality model of local governance (Svara 1985; 1989a; 1990) as the most effective tool for understanding executive-board relationships. While the research did not study public authorities, the model possesses some applicability to authorities. As previously mentioned, the concept of dichotomy permits the differentiation between policy and implementation while recognizing the players and functions of policy and implementation continuously overlap (Svara, 1999b; 2001).

This study suggests that Svara's model is not only applicable to public transportation authorities but public authorities in general. More importantly when the dichotomy-duality model is considered in conjunction with the typology of board member preferences and behaviors, a new layer of understanding is applied to expand the model beyond lines of power and responsibility. Board-executive relationships can actually be studied in relation to power and responsibility to analyze public authority governance and management.

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Svara's model divides the classic policy-administration model discussed in Chapter One into mission, policy, administration and management. Mission is described as the guidance of the organization while policy includes mid-range policy decisions decided by council with advice of staff. In his model elected officials are the primary mission builders with administrators offering advice and counsel while officials and staff share equal influence in policy formulation with technical expertise playing a significant role, although councils establish policy guidelines as a framework for policy development (Svara 1985; 1990). Staff roles grow larger in administration of decisions and low-level implementation policy with some council oversight through citizen input or active interest in decision-making. Management is the domain of executives and includes human, material, and informational resources (Svara 1985; 1989a; 1990). Mission, policy, administration, and management are the primary functions of government structure but what the model emphasizes is duality, that dichotomy exists but that functions of government are shared but at varying degrees. Executives provide the technical guidance on mission and policy while officials have a responsibility for oversight of program outcomes and accountability.

Applicability of a Typology

The introductory chapter posited that Svara's research is applicable to the transportation authority structure. Generally in this exploratory study, it has been found to be the case, although relationships did not always follow the expected patterns. This study, however, suggests that the model is incomplete, as it focuses exclusively on the functions of governance but does not account for individual preferences and the manager's ability to navigate these preferences toward effective relationships that are

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absolutely crucial to the effectiveness of the organization and the services the public

receives. Unlike Svara's research, which examined the deviations from the typical

division of power and responsibility (Figure 6.1, all figures are located in the Appendix),

this variation on his model locates the board member types in consideration of the

conceptual dichotomy and duality articulated in his research. This research did not focus

on the lines of responsibility and power, which was the crux of his study. Rather this

research uncovers board member preferences that may or may not fall where the formal

lines of power and responsibility are drawn. In this expanded model, boards substitute

for city councils and the city manager's functions are those of authority executives.

What this typology demonstrates is that there are six types of board members with

either an orientation toward policy, advisory or community issues and that these

orientations can be subdivided into either a broad or narrow scope of interest. What

Svara's model very broadly describes is how responsibilities are shared between boards

and executives across varying organizational functions. This expansion of the model

instead focuses on how board member preferences fall within this construct. First,

policy-oriented board members are concerned primarily with mission and policy

activities, typically mirroring the council member roles within the dichotomy-duality

model. What the dichotomy-duality model shows is how the responsibilities fall at

different points within the structure. The board members may have larger scopes of

responsibility but the policy-oriented members are centralized within a smaller subset of

preferred responsibility, some of which falls within executive responsibility and power.

When placed on the dichotomy-duality model (Figures 6.2 and 6.3), their interests fall

predominantly within the normal scope of power and responsibility expected of boards.

This is outlined in the mission and policy functions but within the responsibilities of public authority board members, as described in the scholarly literature and this research.

The placement of the "box" on the model is located to reflect several specific tendencies among these board members. First, the location illustrates how the majority of interest is in high-level mission and policy issues identified by board members as policy and planning, nearly all of which falls under board responsibility. Second, the box drops only slightly into administrative issues, reflecting the general preference of most policy-oriented members to keep distance from managerial functions but maintain oversight and accountability in executive implementation of policy decisions and overall direction of the organization. Third, the preferences show some involvement in executive responsibility, but these are mostly within the shared responsibilities of mission and policy and there is relatively little encroachment on executive functions, which is important as these members maintain a strong distinction between board and executive responsibility.

Broad focus, policy-oriented board members place considerable attention on the mission and policy functions of the organization but prefer a generally wider scope of responsibility for mission and policy (Figure 6.2). Different from this conceptualization is the policy-oriented, but narrow focused, board members who have the same general interest but are less focused on the multitude of policy and mission requirements of a governing board and prefer a more narrow set of influence (Figure 6.3). They do not shirk or shed their duties in other areas of board responsibility—they just prefer to be more heavily involved in specific areas.

Next is the location of advisory-oriented board members, both broad and narrow focus, within the dimensions of the governmental process. Advisory-oriented board members' focus, like policy-oriented members, are impacted by the scope of interest articulated by the individual members and may fall across different areas of responsibility, including executive authority. The difference lies primarily in the location of advisory preferences of these types of board members, as shown in Figures 6.4 and 6.5. As described in the typology, these board members recognize the demarcation between executive and board responsibility but seek an active role in executive decision-making through advice and counsel.

These advisory members are more interested in advising the executive as he or she crafts mission and policy for board approval, as shown though location of preferences in the lower potion of the policy box and in the upper portion of the administrative box. Oversight and advice plays a much greater role for these members, as demonstrated by the preferences that fall under executive responsibility. This helps visualize the areas where advisory-oriented board members seek to ensure policy recommendations reflect board values, especially individual preferences, which encompass a wider variety of issues, especially service delivery. The more information they have on executive decisions the more comfortable they are approving executive-driven recommendations, especially when decisions incorporate their preferences.

Community-oriented board members are much harder to place, as their preferences for involvement in authority issues is considerably wider. Those board members' focus is far less involved in high-level mission and policy but rather street-level policy, street-level oversight and individual expertise with a connection to a

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specialized community. The preference for involvement is mostly within decisions

related to on street services and organizational management. Believing appointments are

based on *representation*, they act as liaisons between the authority and the community

with low-level policy and oversight as their two most important responsibilities but with

a desire for awareness on an increased number of issues. Frequently awareness and

involvement goes beyond policy and service by questioning decisions falling under

executive authority with a decreased appreciation for executive and board lines of

authority.

It is within this understanding that community-oriented board member

preferences were placed (Figures 6.6 and 6.7). First, these members are interested are in

the lower portion of the policy dimension and in a smaller area, reflecting the lower level,

on street policy preferences. Second, the oversight aspect of community-oriented board

members is of a much wider range, as exhibited through the larger sized box placed on

the model. Third, these board members have a much stronger preference for low-level

issues and executive functions as shown in the larger areas falling under administration

and management and reflecting a much higher level of board member encroachment on

executive authority. The ideas described above in policy- and advisory-oriented

members that differentiate narrow and broad focus members applies to this type as well;

however, the narrow focused members' boxes are also larger, suggesting members'

desire for increased awareness of issues, even when interest areas are narrow focused.

Consideration of the Typology on Board-Executive Relationships

The typology presented here achieves several important things. First, it

consolidates a wide variety of board member preferences and behaviors within a limited

number of board member types while accounting for the different perspectives and values these board members hold. Second, the typology can be understood within Svara's well-established and supported studies of local government structures and therefore provides greater understanding of how board members relate to functions of governance, especially in the ambiguous environment of public authorities. Third, this typology allows scholars, elected officials, public managers and board members to understand how these individual preferences and member types impact governance. Ultimately, this dissertation is about expanding our understanding of authorities through exploration of the factors impacting relationships between public authority board members and executives. It is through this typology that we can understand how board members preferences and perspective play out in the board-executive relationship.

What this typology means for public transportation authority executives is that their ability to identify board member preferences and place them in "boxes" will go a long way toward understanding why they interact with board members in the way they do and also how they manage their organizations. Executives are fully aware of the preferences of individual board members but they tend to look at them as a collection of individual preferences as opposed to a collection of types. Boards are comprised of very different members—policy, advisory and community types with a varying level of focus that reflects different breadths and depths of interest. The different types of members have very different ideas of what is important to the organization with very different ideas of what is important to the public with some members "stretching" the boundaries of their respective boxes on a continual or ad hoc basis.

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For executives, each different board member type presents its own set of opportunities and challenges while forcing the careful balance the many interests, wants and needs of their boards. Policy-oriented board members are the ideal-type members for public transportation authorities for a number of reasons. The modern public transportation authority is extremely reliant on outside organizations and agencies for resources and support, especially funding, especially parent governments at the local level and state and federal agencies for grants to fund operating assistance and capital equipment. Without this public funding the systems would cease to exist as we now know them, as user fees are insufficient to cover the cost of operation or equipment. Policy-oriented board members have a very strong preference and motivation toward high-level financial policy and direct the organization along core values of efficiency and effectiveness to ensure the long-term capacity of the system to grow and provide transportation services critical to the life of a city.

The emphasis on developing financial support for the organization is not the sole benefit of policy-oriented members to the executive and the organization. These board members have a strong emphasis on ensuring the business of authority is properly executed through developing and approving (with thorough consideration) high-level policy; however, they apply proper levels of oversight and accountability to ensure mid- and low-level policy is executed within the confines of the board and toward the organization's goals. Additionally they bring strong connections to higher-level players within the political landscape and can open doors for the board and executive and increase access at critical junctures. Most important, these board members have a much greater awareness of the proper roles and responsibilities, both formal and informal, of

both the board and executive and allow each set of actors to fulfill their duties effectively for public benefit.

In many ways relationships with these board members are much easier for the executive to manage because the areas of interest are predominately mission and policy, areas in which these members already hold tremendous responsibility. Because these areas are already within the board's purview there is a decreased opportunity for conflict over board and executive responsibility, especially issues that may lead to micromanagement. They have greater understanding of how a board is expected to function and hold a higher standard for themselves and work effectively and according to these standards, making it much easier to the executive to manage and administer services with board support. Additionally, these areas of mission and policy are functions shared among the board and executive creating a stronger connection, with each professionally and personally vested in organizational success.

Still these board members present their own set of challenges. First, policy-oriented board members have little interest in non-policy issues, making it extremely difficult for executives when they are struggling and need advice and support for internal problems and challenges. A policy board may have limited understanding of the contextual issues within the organization and may turn a blind eye toward these issues, evaluating the executive solely on performance measures, budget management and similar policy-related signposts. Second, these board members have higher expectations for board authority and can present very strong, if not willful, perspectives and impose very difficult standards and expectations for the executive and organization. This is multiplied when a board comprised of multiple power players imposes different

expectations, placing the executive between divergent viewpoints and both expecting results.

Third, if the board and executive hold very different opinions on the direction of the transportation authority and its services, it may be very difficult for the executive to guide and direct services he or she feels will best serve the transportation needs of the city. In a battle of wills between the executive and board the executive almost always loses—right or wrong—because the board members carry considerable weight within the community and with the parent government. Power players can hold tremendous influence and not always to the benefit of executives. Finally, depending on a broad of narrow focus, these board members can require an exceptional amount of involvement and interaction for the executive. Members who seek to drill down into very complex issues may place tremendous strain on the staff and executive then they must constantly develop new recommendations, prepare proposals for presentation and research and distill according to board member questions and preferences. The non-stop policy attention can detract from the organization's ability to refine present policies and programs to improve its core mission—transportation operations and services.

Advisory-oriented board members offer a different aspect of governance and relationships for the executive because although they bring stature and expertise to the table there is much less power and influence. This creates a vacancy in board responsibility for mission and policy and places the executive in a more prominent role in crafting organizational direction. The greatest value of the advisory-oriented board member is the technical expertise brought to the board and executive, producing a constant well of resources to draw from on a variety of issues. The advice often comes in

very important areas such a finance, law or management and can be applied across a wide swath of issues. Questions help guide the development of policy and programs to create a higher level of attention to issues. While preferences lean to mid- and low-level policy they offer a tremendous amount of perspective and advice at critical junctures and an executive willing to take advantage of this opportunity can benefit not only in terms of technical information but also in building confidence and strengthening the board-executive relationship.

Overall, the relationship between executive and advisory-oriented board members is very good and quite easy to maintain. The decreased interest in mission and policy creates a greater level of freedom for executives, allowing them to be more involved at higher levels that challenge the organization and allow for more innovative approaches to services. While innovation can be met with resistance, as the ideas fall outside of the board member's expectations, the advice offered can be heeded and reflected in decisions. Even if disagreement arises, there is usually little long-term effect because interest is mostly surface level and program success breeds support. The mid-and low-level policy preferences are usually already within the board's responsibility and even when the executive holds the power for some of those decisions, it is easy to keep the board informed with updates telephone calls, e-mails, and reports at committee and formal meetings. By assuring the board their advice has been considered and by providing detailed and complete reports for review, the oversight and accountability interests are met with little controversy. In reality, the executive is in the power position with advisory-oriented members because the executive has established the political contacts, has a much stronger grip on organizational policy and mission as well as the

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system itself. Executives hold the majority of influence on budget, policy, service development and implementation and rely on the board primarily to approve measures, which the executive shapes to reflect board member advice and preferences.

The board members do require considerable more attention than policy-oriented members, primarily because they have a greater interest in executive decision-making and organizational operation. Curiosity requires more information, education and handholding due to interest in a wider variety of issues and increased expectations for oversight. The board members often lack political prowess, which makes it much easier for the executive to control organizational direction but at the same time the executive must tread lightly to avoid offending members. This is a very difficult part of the relationship to manage because the executive is pitted between board members who often lack the ability to impose their own political will on others but have concerns about an overly strong executive that bypasses board members and fails to include them in political maneuvering.

As a result, communication becomes far more critical and difficult because it must be provided more frequently and on more subjects. The executive must open the organization's doors beyond the boardroom far more regularly than with policy-oriented members. This creates considerable opportunity for micromanagement but is usually tempered by the understanding of the executive's need to manage and administer services as her or she sees fit. Where this grows tenuous is when the board member's advice, especially in more controversial subjects, is either outright dismissed or not applied. With a variety of members, this becomes very difficult to balance, as different members offer different advice and expect different results. The ability of a strong executive to

gather the advice and apply it properly to the satisfaction of a board is extremely

challenging and easily creates discord among the membership. Advice can be constant,

unwanted but required and narrow focus board members may demand a much higher

level of attention and involvement in critical issues, possibly leading to the detriment of

the relationship when executive and member agendas are entrenched and opposed.

By far the most difficult relationship to maintain is with community-oriented

board members—the most intriguing type identified in this study. The motivation for

decision-making is very different for these members than for others in the typology.

Each decision is viewed almost exclusively through the lens of their respective

communities. They have a very strong interest in low-level policy and management

issues because these are factors that most often impact the services that communities

receive. Boards comprised of community-oriented members are extremely valuable if the

political goal is to connect users and affected communities with the authority. Boards

tend to be comprised of elites with limited interaction or connection to those directly

touched by services. While opportunity for input exists through board meeting public

forums or required public hearings for policy or service changes, marginalized groups are

unwilling or unable to participate and are intimidated by the public process. Therefore

citizens within these communities seek out ministers, social workers or politically active

volunteers before traditional resources when problems or concerns arise. As a result of

this connection, community-oriented board members can be a very calming influence

within certain communities by speaking for the authority to quell community concerns or

explain issues to citizens.

These members emphasize low-level issues because they are legitimate conduits and voices for the community they represent. Community-oriented board members have strong connections to these groups, which becomes most critical to the board-executive relationship when proposed service changes may have a direct, negative impact. Change with negative effect on a person the board member must face becomes much harder to support. This is particularly important for community-oriented board members working within these communities because they identify closely with the transit dependent, working poor.

Community-oriented board members face internal contradictions that make relationships exceptionally difficult to manage. First, as board members they are appointed to represent a population but as a governing board must represent the parent government as well. Difficult choices must be made when governing the use of public money but community-oriented members are personally torn between the dual values of serving the parent government through budgets, oversight and efficiency when they must make decisions that will negatively affect their communities. Many of the decisions boards must make are decisions for cost containment, especially in times of a budget crisis. When a board member has emotional ties to a population that will be negatively impacted by decisions—even when they must be made—the member feels a sense of frustration or failure because the only available options will hurt their community. An executive placed in the constant position of making necessary recommendations that evoke these feelings will have a very difficult time engendering trust and support from the member.

Second, these board members are most interested in services that will benefit the community, especially their own, but are unwilling to take risks to achieve innovation and improvement of services for users. They see the value of changes but fear that even a small subset of riders will be hurt by service changes and therefore will not support measures, regardless of the opportunity for long-term change and direction of the organization. The status quo becomes politically and organizationally easier to maintain. An executive seeking to make change for the betterment of the authority and the city— greater ridership, revenue and performance translates directly into greater value for the taxpayer—finds themselves developing and submitting recommendations to board members that see direct, negative consequences between their vote and people's lives. In the case of public transportation it is more painful to take service from those who presently have it than to deny it to those who have never had it. A board member focused on the policy impact for a small population of affected riders and citizens, as opposed to citywide needs or long-term system growth, can be seen as either a voice of the people or a problem for the executive.

Finally, for many community-oriented board members distance provides an advantage because it provides a more balanced view, as closer relationships with the executive might bias decisions and professional distance keeps that balance. At the same time, this same group of members seeks and expects much greater involvement in key decisions that impact their communities but lack the close connections necessary for monitoring the organizational pulse at arm's length. Many of the issues that members are concerned with fall outside the normal responsibilities of the authority board as shown through the typology. Personnel management commonly falls under this scenario

because management decisions to hire, fire or promote often capture the interest of the member because someone in the organization likely has some community ties with a board member. This is especially problematic when board members seek involvement with collective bargaining unit issues such as policy changes and terminations. They have only surface-level knowledge or misinformation but executives cannot reveal certain information because it may violate protections entitled to employees or compromise the grievance and arbitration process. This often occurs over claims of racial discrimination, especially among African-American board members who perceive a predominantly minority ridership base and transit operators include a large African American workforce. When Caucasian executives and managers make controversial personnel decisions a natural tendency to protect a historically disadvantaged class emerges and creates a charged emotional and very dangerous situation for the board and executive.

Micromanagement is a consistent problem for executives with community-oriented board members. These board members hear and see on street issues and because of their position have unfettered access to the executive, frequently calling the executive's oversight into question. Customer complaints about late buses, rude drivers and vehicle breakdowns are valid but become informal agenda items for the board member. How quickly the executive repairs a vandalized shelter, installs a bench near a senior center or deals with a speeding driver colors the relationship with the board member. When it comes to board-level decisions of routes and schedules, concern is expressed over why it serves one apartment complex but not another—regardless of the operational issues of sidewalks, turning radius or population density—and executives

must justify every decision. A particularly bad accident or bus fire calls into question passenger safety, forcing executives to defend training programs and vehicle quality while conversations devolve into voltage regulators, tire pressures and braking mechanisms.

Balancing these diverse perspectives may be one of the most difficult challenges executives face, especially among community-oriented, narrow focused board members. Two different members will have very different concerns on a single issue. One may be bothered by a new route's path of travel because the president of a neighborhood association called them to complain. Another board members is extremely excited because this new route will serve several new low-income housing developments yet the only way to reach the apartments is to travel through the complaining neighborhood. A board member will become concerned with whether the new shelters will be located in the downtown business district and whether they will match the façade along the historic square while another member with a disability is concerned with whether the new shelters have waiting space for wheelchairs and are near curb cuts while third wonders why these new shelters are not in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood. When board members are solely advancing a low-level, user-based agenda and envision their board service solely as connection to, and protection of, the transit user then an increased opportunity for executive-board member conflict arises.

CONCLUSION

This typology of board member preferences has very important and far-reaching implications for governance and the board-executive relationship. Boards are comprised

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of an eclectic group of members, all bringing their own expertise and concerns to the board table. The key for executives is their ability to understand the implications of the different types of members and the opportunities and challenges presented by these various types. How well an executive manages these relationships, takes advantage of board member tendencies and engages them in processes is going to determine his or professional and organizational success.

An important consideration is how well this typology applies to the board members within this study since the development of the typology emerged through the research, which was based on data collected from executives and board members from five different public transportation authorities. When assigning board members from this study within the various board member types one critical theme emerged—the more financial power and authority vested in the board in areas of finance and planning the more often the board members were drawn to policy and advisory orientation. In Nashville and Memphis, most members fell into the policy or advisory/policy mold with only one member holding a community orientation. Lexington was extremely interesting as many of the members fit the policy or advisory mold but those with an advisory-orientation expressed much greater awareness of policy, indicating a shift in perspective and a declining level of interest in purely community-oriented perspectives. Chattanooga was comprised of only one policy- and one policy/advisory-oriented member with the rest falling under the advisory, advisory/community and community types. Jackson had no policy types with a much greater tendency toward advisory- and community-oriented members. When examining the level of financial power available to the authority and the types of members serving on the board the connection was clear: when there was a lower

level of financial and high-level policy opportunity available then there was a much greater prevalence of community-oriented members on the public transportation authority board.

This chapter extends the findings of this research into the development of a typology which supports the adaptation of Svara's seminar model of local governance in two ways. First, it applies the dichotomy-duality model of governance to public authorities, an approach absent in the quasi-governmental research or in studies of local government structure. Second, this research overlays a new dimension of individual preferences and motivations to the model with considerable implications to how these preferences impact lines of board and executive responsibility. This has potential applicability to other local government structures that continue to attract scholarly attention. Chapter Seven presents the implications of this research and poses the unanswered questions deserving further systematic study.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the dissertation. After presenting a summary of the study it draws the implications of the findings. Recommendations for future research are offered and an assessment of what this study means for the future of public transportation is made.

STUDY SUMMARY

Public authorities play a highly active role in public service delivery as an alternative to traditional governmental structures in the U.S. While public authorities have existed for more than 100 years, little scholarly attention has been paid to them and there remains a considerable gap in the understanding of authority structure, operation and especially governance. This study sought to expand the understanding of authorities from the perspective of key actors within them—the governing board members and executives. Most research is focused on organizational purpose of the public authorities with an emphasis on the flexibility, accountability and productivity of authorities. While this is useful to understanding authority roles and structure, it neglects the internal and external functional relationships and how these relationships affect decision making processes and shape policy decisions. Once an understanding of the board-executive relationship is developed a much greater connection can be drawn between structure and organizational performance; until now no scholarly research has been devoted to this

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critical relationship. This dissertation provides an understanding of how board member role perceptions and individual preferences impact the board-executive relationship and establishes an empirical baseline of knowledge that helps to overcome the significant challenges in researching public authority governance.

Quasi-governments, or hybrid organizations, are appealing to politicians because they are modeled after private organizations and offer public service with business-like processes and can be shaped to virtually any organizational shape. Among the various types of quasi-governmental institutions available, public authorities are quite unique. Formed to build and operate large infrastructure projects they have transformed into strong planning and development arms of public service but with an emphasis on revenue from user fees and beholden to a strong parent government (Smith 1969). Authorities offer an atypical approach to public service delivery but research has generally ignored how the board-executive structure and relationships impacts governance.

Public authorities are important to students and practitioners of public affairs because they are a growing form of government. Yet, relatively little attention is paid to their operation and structure. Employed almost exclusively at state and local levels, authorities provide service across a variety of policy areas of critical importance to the study of governance, management, policy analysis, and organizational theory with important issues of neutral administration, accountability and reform at the heart of the structure. An effective balance of responsibility between boards and executives is essential for achieving organizational policy objectives and performance. No prior research on authorities has studied this balance or what affects the board-executive relationship and how it impacts the executive's ability to manage the organization. The

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literature on boards in governmental, non-profit and for-profit organizations focuses almost exclusively on formal responsibility, composition and effectiveness but neglects the executive-board relationship.

This study fills this void, emphasizing how executives and board members view internal and external roles in addition to perceptions of formal and informal responsibilities. Most importantly this research provides insight into the preferences, motivations and behaviors of individual board members. This insight now informs on issues of political power, effectiveness, representation, agendas and decision making while uncovering the factors that impact support for authority executives. In addition to establishing an empirical foothold on the critical board-executive relationship, this research applied and expanded the dichotomy-duality model of governance and has allowed for nuances in respect to how organizational structure influences the relationship aspect of public policy.

FINDINGS REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of public authority boards and the impact of board-executive relationships on public service governance. The study first considered levels of fiscal power available and existent within these five public transportation authorities and examined whether this affects the willingness of influential policy makers serve on the authority board. The study identified an important link between the limits on board financial power and board member ability to influence internal and external policy decisions or the guide and direct funding. Most participants in this study described their board as possessing a limited ability to impact budget

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processes. They also indicated that budgetary influence is typically after the post-parent government process and after staffs have revised and adjusted numbers based on funding allocations.

Boards that can direct new revenue streams play a more prominent role in the political landscape and exercise more power in directing authority progress toward a comprehensive transportation network for their city. The most significant factor impacting board power and influence and the ability to achieve high-level policy (internally and externally) is financial reliance on parent governments. When compared to LexTran, the one transit system within the study with dedicated funding, the remaining systems are much more reliant on federal, state and local governments for funding and struggle with long-range capital and planning initiatives. Overall, budget development remains a staff and parent government driven process where the board lacks influence but retains some post-budget involvement and approval. However, this later phase of involvement does not hold the same level of power and influence as near-total budget control. In the absence of increased funding streams from parent governments, boards are reluctant to make unpopular decisions to cut positions, redirect services or increase fares.

Yet, boards have considerable opportunity to influence financial direction of the authority through increased oversight of revenue and expenditures and through controls over contracts, purchases and capital planning for vehicles and facilities. This facet of fiscal power remains quite challenging for most boards due to the complexity of government procurement, the advanced technical equipment needs and the vast implications involved in facility and vehicle planning. Boards that exhibited considerable

levels of influence in financial management and capital planning took advantage of their powers and conducted comprehensive operating analyses, focused attention on capital projects and applied increased emphasis on funding use as it related to organizational mission and policy goals. With this emphasis on organizational performance and opportunistic decision making boards are able to develop and maintain a high-level policy concentration despite the lack of dedicated funding. While some of these authority boards established higher-levels of policy-making influence, there was an absence of very high-level political players commonly seen on boards holding strong financial power. In this study, policy-centric boards came about due to the collection of individual members with penchants for financial management and capital planning. While boards were not particularly powerful on the respective political landscapes, they had some level of influence and sought to exercise power when available.

As authority boards exhibited a reduction of high-level political actors and policy players there was also a reduction in the availability of significant capital projects. The same was true when executives played a stronger role in financial direction and management, limiting opportunity for board member influence over financial management and oversight. When this occurred board composition shifted from a group of experienced political and policy players to technical experts and mid-level local participants and included a greater presence of street-level interests toward social services and individual riders. These lower-level community players with service-level agendas had individual interests and agendas that fell primarily under executive authority. Weak fiscal authority from limited budget influence translates into limited financial oversight, creating boards of low-level players with service specific agendas. Attention to

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representation and protecting ridership emerged in the absence of high-level policy and
social service advocacy for marginalized communities became more prevalent. Board
members with lower-level agendas had distinct connections to on street service and
personnel decisions, either front line employee or administrative employees. Active
interest in personnel surfaced through a sire for involvement in employee selection,
affirmative action practices and control of the collective bargaining unit contract, wages
and working conditions.

Boards comprised of members with lower level agendas indicated that
representation was a significant factor. Board members selected to represent certain
communities or expertise had decreased interest in overarching authority business. They
were instead more interested in how decisions would impact their perceived constituency
or their own individual preferences. Limited financial and policy influence breeds an
interest in low-level, service-oriented issues that, while *viewed* as policy, in reality are
more closely associated with operational management. Board attention should be on
mission and policy issues but in the absence of high-level policy opportunity emphasis
falls on more operational. Lower-level board members take on increased ownership of
these types of decisions, which on its face seem high-level. In reality these decisions are
relatively low-level because high-level issues deal with *causes* of decisions, not the
decisions themselves. Low-level board members can become caught in a trap of low-
level policy concerns, many of which fall under managerial authority and can lead to
excessive incursions on executive responsibility and create increased micromanagement
and conflict.

This attention and micromanagement can create conflict because board member emphasis on lower-level issues deviates from the board policy-orientation. How executives manage employees or implement services may be stark contrast to individual member preferences and may create considerable conflict when agendas and preferences collide. Executives are careerists and understand how to deliver services and sidestep obstacles that inhibit effective management of human, mechanical and financial resources while boards have only surface understanding of these processes and view executives decisions through a lens colored by less information, experience and expertise.

Conflict is more likely with lower-level members because executives are interested in the overall system and its long-term success as opposed to a narrow subgroup of riders or community interests. Executives have an emphasis on global aspects of service delivery and transportation networks and lack the personal ties to communities that lower-level board members possess. Conflict rooted in personal agendas is easily identifiable for executives, as it is usually based on low-level issues that stand out from the normal business of the authority. It is usually manageable for executives but becomes problematic when it turns to the constant micromanaging of executive decisions and consumes organizational resources as staff responds to a barrage of questions and demands. It can also become destructive for the organization and damage careers when battles over unsubstantiated claims of racism arise or when demands for nepotism in contracts and hiring permeate the relationship.

This study first sought to explore the perceived roles of board members serving on public transportation authorities. There was a strong feeling among participants that the basis of the mayoral appointment created an expectation that individual perspectives

and preferences should become part of the debate and decision making processes. Closely associated was whether members felt appointments were based on a need to represent certain perspectives or populations. The connection between appointment purpose and representational goals translated into a strong belief among members that a diversity of viewpoints is an important contribution to policy and decision making.

Board members saw themselves as policy-makers with budget control but descriptions of control included routine questions and issues, not policy or budget control. There was, however, a very strong belief that asking these routine questions was of critical importance to the public process. Board members typically perceived a higher level of policy power and stronger role than they actually possessed. Most often policy descriptions were service-related and not couched in the financial terms of the authority and displayed limited understanding of financial; and high-level policy implications. Policy power was usually described in terms of debate and consideration of on-street services decisions. This focused on how boards should avoid the rubberstamping of executive recommendations. Of importance is the strong connection between board powers to develop and manage funding, their ability to participate in organizational planning and the type of members that serve on the board. Boards with more financial authority had a much higher level of policy-making interest. As financial power and opportunity decreased, however, lower-level players began to comprise board membership—often with an emphasis on low-level policy issues under executive domain.

The research next sought to understand when encroachment on executive authority occurs. It was found that when board responsibility consists almost exclusively of service-level decisions it creates an emphasis on service-level issues. When these

decisions involve issues related to members' technical expertise or affect community ties, a desire for increased involvement and encroachment is more likely. These types of service-related decisions do require a certain level of board involvement because authority boards have formal powers requiring approval of certain service recommendations, and because they are ultimately responsible for the executive's management of the authority. The issue is that board attention should be directed toward a more comprehensive understanding of decisions and implications while exercising powers of executive accountability. By emphasizing policy implications of executive recommendations and maintaining accountability of executive decisions *without direct involvement*, boards fulfill the authority's mission-policy needs and allow executives to perform the administration-management functions of the organization. The challenge for executives is how to handle members that supplant their attention on implications and accountability with involvement in formulating recommendations and making managerial decisions.

Finally, attention was paid to how board encroachment on executive responsibility impacted executive support. The research, however, found there was little conflict. When conflict occurred, it had either nominal or crippling effect on the board-executive relationship. Nominal impact occurred because the encroachment was usually a circumstance of member-executive conflict vs. board-executive conflict, meaning the conflict rarely included more than one member of the board. Additionally, when conflict was nominal board members applied stronger levels of restraint (as did a strong board chair) when the system is very successful or when the executive has involved the members in certain decision from the start. The board member may accept the decision

because he or she recognizes executive authority, defers to overall effective leadership or at least understands the basis for the decisions—even though they may strongly disagree. When the conflict is severe, it shifts executive attention from innovative policy recommendations and effective management to defending against micromanagement and accusations. This situation can quickly spiral into a circumstance of an executive entrenched in a battle among the executive and individual board members, the board as a whole and the parent government.

The impact of the conflict is generally a function of the board-executive relationship and the executive's ability to manage this relationship. An effective executive can easily manage a desire for involvement in low-level issues of dirty shelters or malfunctioning air conditioning units. By recognizing the interests and needs of the members and balancing this against their own responsibilities and authority, executives are more able to maintain an effective relationship. This understanding prepares executives to manage conflict without significant impact on the level of board support for the executive. Where this becomes unmanageable for executives is when the interests and involvement undermines executive ability to effectively manage the internal operations of the organization. Excessive board involvement in executive decision making weakens board and staff respect, oversteps boundaries and promotes organizational distrust. These incursions can destroy the critical member-executive relationship and can invoke political power plays that weaken external support for the authority and impair its ability to grow.

Conflict is not necessarily detrimental to the organization. As shown through the board member interviews, even when conflict was present the support levels for the

executive remained moderately strong. It is important to distinguish between conflict that does not impact services and that which becomes detrimental to service delivery. Even when conflict is devastating to individual players, which is to be regretted, the overarching concern is ultimately for the impact on the governance and management of the authority as to program outputs. Conflict, is oft times present but is usually manageable. What matters for public management study and praxis is a greater understanding of *why* conflict occurs as well as *when* conflict becomes unmanageable and imposes costs on the authority and the public it serves.

Emerging from the study of board-executives relationships is a typology of board members classified by their individual preferences and interests and the focus applied to those interest areas. This typology is a result of board member inclination to serve one of three functions: 1) participate in high-level policy decisions and work closely with the executive to grow the system and guide the organization; 2) serve as close advisor to the executive, who will provide the mission and policy leadership and manage the organization; or 3) act as a representational voice of the rider or impacted institution, ensuring voice is provided to disaffected communities. Most of these powers exist under the normal policy and oversight functions of authority boards with policy-oriented and advisory-orientated members playing these roles. Where this typology offers the most guidance for scholars, practitioners and board members is the identification of the community-oriented member. This type of member has a much greater tendency to seek involvement in areas falling under executive authority—involvement more likely to create member-executive conflict.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE OPERATION OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

This research highlights the fundamental fact that *structure matters* for public authorities, especially public transportation authorities because the formal policy powers granted to authorities impact the composition of boards, which in turn impacts governance. This study essentially brought together several different ideas beginning with the importance of board and executive relationships in the public authority structure and the absence of research within the scholarly literature. Second, it identified the trend of declining financial power among transportation authorities as a unique phenomenon in public authority research, considering that much of the emphasis on public authority evaluation is on financial effectiveness and accomplishment. Third, the study identified the dichotomy-duality model of local government structure as applicable to the study of public authorities and combined these areas into a single frame of reference for scholarly research.

Pubic authority executives, specifically general managers of public transportation authorities, can employ these findings to understand the factors that impact board-executive relationships. The findings identify how board members view roles and responsibilities while outlining what members expect of general managers. From an executive management standpoint, this may be single most important aspect of this research—an understanding of how boards view responsibility. This understanding allows executives to identify the factors that impact relationships and creates opportunity for executives to more effectively manage relationships with individual board members and the board as a whole.

Organizational resources of money, personnel and equipment are of extreme importance to operational and service effectiveness and executives manage these resources on a constant basis. However, the results of those managerial decisions are very different from the impact of an executive's ability to manage the board-executive relationship. Executives and board members spoke at length about two very important themes that impact the board-executive relationship—trust and communication. Trust relationships are difficult to develop because it requires considerable executive investment and nurturing of individual interests of board members within a very diverse and complex financial and political environment.

For executives, managing the board is not exclusive to the board-executive relationship. Effective management of the board is also reflected in the executive's political astuteness and his or her ability to turn the membership into weapons for the authority's benefit. It is extremely difficult for managers to wield the board's political power on outside forces, affected communities or unwilling politicians. Maneuvering an entire authority board in a political environment goes beyond the one-on-one aspect of the board-executive relationship. Executives must gauge the relationships' strength, the members' willingness to risk other relationships and the executive's confidence in the organization's ability to ensure the members' influence pays dividends for the authority and the individual members. A diverse board, while challenging, can be deployed in a number of influential areas at different points and times for great benefit to the executive, the organization and the public.

Even when the executive cannot push the board into action because of the risks, is inappropriate at certain junctures or will not have an effect, the members can still work

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one-on-one with the executives to them informally through technical guidance and political leadership. Managers often do not have internal staff or outside organizations they can turn to for moral, technical or leadership support. They may have staff they trust but may not know the other players or understand the political environment. Authority executives can be on a managerial island because they have no organizational counterpart and sometimes cannot reveal their hand to lower-level staff or parent governments. As such, executives need their boards but in a controlled fashion. This is the other key aspect of managing the relationship—letting board members in when needed but keeping them out when required. In many ways, the effective management of the board-executive relationship can be likened to a traffic cop directing two-way travel on a one-way street. The executive is standing in the middle of a busy intersection, using a whistle to get attention when no one is looking and side-stepping obstacles traveling different directions. The executive is waving their board members through when needed but using signs reading "slow" and "stop". He or she is carefully keeping an eye on other traffic and never letting his or her guard down. The manager can take tremendous advantage of the board but if the relationship is not effectively managed, control is lost and the relationship crumbles.

The communication of information is the second key aspect of a successful board-executive relationship. Board members constantly reiterated that good executives listen to the board as a whole or as individuals. The executive must know what to communicate and when in consideration of group and individual preferences for what members want to know (but actually should know) and when to deliver information to avoid surprise. The executive must be accessible and responsive to member concerns

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with thorough and timely follow up and results. The information itself is difficult to manage, as is the frequency and the type. Executives must provide sufficient information to board members when they need it or request it, be careful of why they want it, serve as informational filters to control detail and then frame issues for consideration without giving the perception of holding anything back. The benefit to effective communication that falls outside the usual information levels is that well-informed members can later be relied upon for expertise and support. The key is managing the content and flow of information and keeping actual involvement at a distance because of the danger it may unleash. Once again, the image of a traffic cop works with the executive need to effectively manage communication.

The structural implications of this research are far reaching as well. Public authorities are designed to be independent arms of government service, the hybridization of public and private organizations for the public good through more efficient, effective and responsive service delivery. It is an organizational polemic of traditional bureaucratic government, condemning the red tape and sluggish civil service while extolling the virtues of flexibility and innovation. Yet, public values are not sacrificed through mechanisms of accountability and a public board of directors appointed by a parent government. What is seen through these five public transportation authorities is quite different from what is prescribed by the academic and management literature; however, what is presented is most likely an accurate reflection on the modern conceptualization of low-power pubic authorities.

The modern public transportation authority is almost completely reliant on the parent government for funding resources unless it is able to establish its own dedicated

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funding sources. Once it obtains its own funding stream it can fulfill the intent of the

public authority: operating an independent and fully functioning public service governed

outside the political pressures that impede typical government programs and with an

efficiency that serves the community at an otherwise impossible level. The reality of

parent government funding as the norm for public transportation authorities is the result

an authority structure that was probably not the optimal structure for the newly created

public transportation authorities of the 1950s. Rather, the authority structure was

employed because it allowed for the hybridization of formerly private resources under

public ownership and a convenient solution to the problem of protecting collective

bargaining units within the auspices of public service delivery. Authorities were formed

as a structural solution to a political problem and in many ways the structure does not fit

the organizational needs because most parent governments are yet to empower authority

boards to fully fund the transportation needs of their cities.

The impact of this inadequate power for pubic transportation authorities is a board

comprised of low-level players with street-level interest in transportation within their

community. Instead of past mayors, present council members, business executives and

university presidents we see friends of mayors and council members, past local union

officials, architects, doctors, attorneys, CPAs, ministers, persons with disabilities and

system riders with a large number of retired or flexibly employed individuals who can

commit the time.   These lower level players find homes on authority boards because they

represent populations and serve a political purpose for the parent government.

Authorities were a structural solution to a political problem and the present financial

empowerment will not draw the players to effectively serve the structural needs. As

such, mayors treat the authority board as a political solution to a structural problem and

when the individuals who *need* to serve will not then the authority can be

reconceptualized from a policy board to a political, representational board. A

representational board is quite different from a policy board because it brings the people

closer to their government and the government closer to their people. The question is:

What does the parent government really want?

Public transportation authority boards have become political and representational

boards, as transit ridership is statistically a minority and low-income population based in

an urban center and delivered by a collective bargaining unit. There are buses to be

procured, buildings to be developed, marketing to be deployed and contracts to be

written. The attorney and the CPA add credibility and technical advice to the contracts

while the architect is helpful during a facility construction. The ministers and social

service workers represent the working poor and usually black, transit dependent riders

while the retired union leaders represent the employees. They have a common bond in

that employee rights are working poor rights and that transit systems are well known for

promoting minority hiring, often more than doubling the rates of the minority population

in the general public. The minority interests are employee interests and vice versa. It can

be relatively certain that if there is a dominant university in the city that university will

have formal representation, as will the major industry. The person with the disability will

show that the mayor and the system are serious about accessible transportation and will

calm down the advocacy community while helping provide advice for better service and

offering more than representational lip service.

These are board members with strong ties to their respective communities, have inclinations toward advice and low-level policy with a borderline penchant for micromanagement. They are experts in respective fields and in some cases represent moral obligations closely connected to emotional issues with limited no pretenses for involvement. The impact for executives is a board of potential micromanagers and advisors. When things are going well for the community, they will go well for the board members and therefore things will go well for the executive. The ability to manage the environment when situations become difficult is what differentiates the effective executive from his or her peers. The perception of a community-orientated board can be highly pejorative if they are viewed solely as a collection of non-policy activists and opportunists; however, this is far from reality. Board members and executives recognize the limited political power and policy power available to board members but what they offer otherwise is exceptionally valuable. They provide excellent advice and counsel to executives and wield influence and access within different aspects of the city. Like any other type of board member, it is more a question of whether they competently and professionally direct the business of the authority and how well the executive manages the relationship in regards to how influence and attention will be utilized.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

From the start this study acknowledged the exploratory nature of the research. With a research gap wide enough to drive a bus through, there had to be some intellectual and research starting point to begin the reconsideration of public authorities and boards but along an entirely new dimension. As such, the trend of declining fiscal authority and

the expected tendency to draw lower-level board members with lower-level agendas provided this opportunity. Beginning with these simple issues—declining financial policy power as an impetus for increased managerial conflict and a series of research questions the study has identified a clear link between financial authority and how high-level policy opportunity attracts high-level players while low-level policy attract low-level players. It is evident that the different types of members offer their own sets of costs and benefits but creates an effective political machine when a comfortable mix of orientation and focus was available for executives and the authority.

The study establishes a link between financial policy opportunity and the types of players drawn to public authority boards but the study did not consistently find the intense conflict expected within the board-executive relationship. Past horror stories from board members and general managers, including experiences on other boards and organizations, show how easily conflict can emerge and reveals a delicate board-executive relationship within public authorities. This study has provided some indication as to why these relationships remain supportive—despite the ample opportunity for conflict—through effective management, inclusion and awareness. However, there needs to be an expansion of this research to see if conflict is more widespread outside of these authorities and whether the potential causes outlined here have merit beyond the limited sample. Additionally, what is included in this research is a small collective of board members and executives focusing on the role of board members on public transportation authorities. There were very strong connections for board members among formal and informal responsibilities, representation, agendas and decision making. While valuable,

the ideas must be applied elsewhere to see if the circumstances and preferences described in the interviews occur in other types of public authorities.

Critical to public authorities is the board-executive relationship and opportunity for conflict within this relationship is seemingly omnipresent; however, as suggested above conflict is not necessarily detrimental to the organization or its services. Of considerable worth to scholars and governors is a more in depth study of board-executive conflict and its impact. Emerging from this study is the realization that most conflict is manageable with limited negative, long-term impact on the board-executive relationship and with limited consequence for the organization or its services. However, this research is limited in that is offers understanding of where conflict is most likely to develop in terms of micromanagement of executive responsibility. The next step in this area of research is to better understand the varying aspects of conflict along lines of minimal and maximum impact (positive and negative) and within a framework the extent to which conflict imposes costs on the authority and its users. A fuller understanding of conflict and its consequences would contribute significantly to evaluating organizational effectiveness and would provide greater applicability of these findings on the board-executive relationship.

This study's intent was the application of the dichotomy-duality model to public authorities for purposes of understanding organizational frameworks. The result, however, was a greater employment of the model that suggests the conceptual foundation and framework has viability and utility within the study of public authorities. Svara's study (1985) included surveys with a large enough sample to perform quantitative analysis for deeper applicability and established a baseline for further research. His

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model has since expanded beyond council-manager systems to numerous treatments of local structure and governance and public authorities should receive similar treatment in terms of determining the model's level of applicability to the public authority structure. The constructs of mission, policy, administration and management are widely appropriate to most governmental organizations; however, his research spurred a series of variations on the dichotomy-duality model to reflect strong manager, strong council and manager incursion to describe different aspects of local government structure. It is of significant consequence to the study of public administration and local government structure as to whether the dichotomy-duality model has widespread applicability in authorities.

At the same time this study articulates a new dimension of personal preferences within a typology of board members overlaid on the dichotomy-duality model. There exists a potential to expand the model to account for the varying responsibilities existent in local government. Just as the applicability of Svara's model to public authorities deserves more rigorous evaluation, this new dimension is worthy of similar study to see if the typology has applicability outside of authorities. Can preference account for the specific variations and conflict between council and managers in council-manager systems, a local government framework notorious for its vicious political battles and short tenure for city managers?

An extremely important area of further research is the board member typology itself. The typology emerged as a byproduct from the study of board-executive relationships and the study design was crafted around an understanding of these relationships. A framework for understanding board member types was an unexpected research result but emerged from the data and subsequent analysis. Now that a

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framework for classifying board members has materialized, a much more specific analysis is necessary to refine the members types along dimensions of orientation and focus in addition to developing more specific and measurable variables to place board members in the appropriate typological boxes. What is necessary at this juncture is the formation of a typological schema to better explain classification of member types and articulate the variables that define or describe each type of board member.

This study has established a series of potential variables and presents considerable opportunity to expand the study of individual preferences and behaviors through more rigorous qualitative and quantitative analysis. A more defined typology would allow for a greater analysis of the types of board members serving on public authorities and the extent to which authority power and responsibility predicts the types of members serving on authority boards. This study has laid a conceptual foundation for further research and the next level of inquiry will more effectively apply the typology and significantly expand the understanding of board-executive relationships and public authorities in general.

Also of consequence is the financial impact of Hurricane Katrina on the public transportation industry. The past year saw massive fuel price increases that forced many transportation systems to increase fares (or at least evaluate the need) in order to maintain budgets and survive fiscally. In nearly every interview during this study the budgetary struggles of transit systems caused by fuel prices played a significant role. What is of curiosity and worthy of continued study is whether the increased attention to budgetary matters raised the long-term awareness of the authorities' financial responsibilities and powers and whether this had significant impact on the data and findings. Considering the

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lack of detailed financial knowledge available from a number of board members, there is

doubt as to any significant impact on this study's findings and analysis considering

financial power was only one dynamic of the study. There is considerable value in

evaluating this trend to determine whether this short-term awareness has long-term

impact on board member understanding of higher-level policy processes, especially

among advisory- and community-oriented board members.

At the same time, this was a qualitative evaluation of responsibility, role

preferences and opinions, valid for the level of exploration needed for this line of

research but insufficient to support sweeping generalizations on board members or public

authorities. This research provides a first step toward understanding the context of public

authority boards and provides a conceptual framework for more systematic inquiries into

the subject. The next level of research needs to focus on measurement of these

ambiguous constructs of formal and informal responsibility, some typology of

representation for comparison across systems and some meaningful way to expand these

basic ideas beyond these five Southeastern cities. There needs to be extensive study to

establish whether these ideas end along I-40 and I-75 in Tennessee and Kentucky or

whether they apply to the entire industry. Even more importantly, do they apply outside

of public transportation?

The result of this study is a greater understanding of what impacts public

authority governance while contributing to the scholarly literature on quasi-governmental

institutions. Through in-depth personal interviews nuances in organizational

performance, policy development, organizational management and governance have been

discerned. This provides insight into, and a basis for future research about, board-

executive relationships in public transportation authorities. Authority managers are faced with a very unique and multi-dimensional aspect of their boards—agenda and authority and the impact on governance and their ability to effectively manage the organization. Boards have varying levels of authority—representational, financial, planning and oversight—most of which is bestowed at some level by the parent government or by the board itself as it expands and contracts its powers. The powers the parent government vests in the board dictates the types of members that will actually serve, driving the board composition from an aspect of power and authority while creating a unique set of opportunities and challenges for the authority.

Therefore, the most important next step within the study of public authority structure is the study of parent governments. Throughout this research there has been an implied and now explicit understanding of the impact of parent government decisions on public authorities. The level of funding determines the level of powers available and the mayor and staff bestow certain expectation for board members and executives through their appointment power. Questions exist as to whether the functions of representation and the resulting individual agendas are intentional and whether the parent government expects these factors to play a significant role in the authority's governance. There needs to be a much greater understanding of the triangulation of the board, executive and parent government and a greater definition of the expected roles of each with the governance of the authority and the impact on service delivery. As shown, parent government do more than establish a structure—they intentionally and unintentionally dictate the opportunities and challenges for boards and executives to govern and manage public service delivery and play a significant role in shaping the board-executive relationship.

To be sure, the formal power of these authorities depends on how much authority the parent government delegates. Distinctive in this vested power is that it unintentionally drives the composition of the authority board. Appointees come to represent not the powers of the authority but the absence of powers, the expectations of service delivery and the political value of representation within the community. These factors comprise a board of agendas, inclusive of varying levels of political power and influence, that contribute to collective organizational direction but laden with individuality. It is with this understanding of authority and agenda that public transportation authorities venture. It is within this framework of authority and agenda that the board-executive relationship takes root and grows.

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APPENDIX

Table 2.1: Public Transportation Authority Organizational Summary

City / System	Fiscal Year 2005 Annual Ridership (in millions)			
	Total	Fixed Route	Rail	Paratransit
Memphis / MATA	12	10.5	1	0.25
Nashville / MTA	8	7.85	-	0.15
Chattanooga / CARTA	3.2	1.7	0.44	0.04
Lexington / Lextran	2.11	2	-	0.11
Jackson / JTA	0.48	0.46	-	0.034

City / System	Vehicle Fleet (Revenue Vehicles)			
	Total	Fixed Route	Rail	Paratransit
Memphis / MATA	280	194	20	65
Nashville / MTA	194	137	-	57
Chattanooga / CARTA	84	66	4	14
Lexington / Lextran	58	58	-	-
Jackson / JTA	20	13	-	7

City / System	System Descriptors			
	Fixed Routes	2006 Annual Operating Budget	2006 Annual Capital Budget	Employees
Memphis / MATA	33	$47 million	$18 million	600
Nashville / MTA	38	$37 million	$13 million	430
Chattanooga / CARTA	16	$13 million	$5.0 million	165
Lexington / Lextran	18	$11.9 million	$3.7 million	133
Jackson / JTA	8	$2 million	$0.80 million	38

City / System	Collective Bargaining Unit Employees			
	Total	Operators	Maintenance	Other
Memphis / MATA	400	260	98	42
Nashville / MTA	320	265	55	10
Chattanooga / CARTA	100	100	35	5
Lexington / Lextran	110	91	19	0
Jackson / JTA	31	25	6	0

Table 2.2: Public Transportation Authority Board Term Summary

City / System	Board Composition		
	Total	Term Length (in years)	Limit on Number of Consecutive Terms
Memphis / MATA	7	3	Unlimited
Nashville / MTA	5	5	2
Chattanooga / CARTA	11	5	Unlimited
Lexington / Lextran	8	4	2
Jackson / JTA	5	2	2

Table 2.3: Public Transportation Authority Board Members and Executives and Participation

City / System	Subject Name	Position
Memphis / MATA	Will Hudson	Executive
Memphis / MATA	Ray Holt	Chair
Memphis / MATA	Dr. Fred Johnson	Vice Chair
Memphis / MATA	Cliffie Pugh	Member
Memphis / MATA	Karl P. Birkholz	Member
Memphis / MATA	M. P. Carter	Member
Memphis / MATA	Dick Walker	Member
Nashville / MTA	Paul Ballard	Executive
Nashville / MTA	Lewis Lavine	Chair
Nashville / MTA	Gail Carr Williams	Vice Chair
Nashville / MTA	William L. Barnes	Member
Nashville / MTA	Marian T. Ott	Member
Chattanooga / CARTA	Tom Dugan	Executive
Chattanooga / CARTA	E. Stephen Jett	Chair
Chattanooga / CARTA	Joe B. Hutcherson	Vice Chair
Chattanooga / CARTA	Wanza Lee	Secretary
Chattanooga / CARTA	Robert A. Franklin	Member
Chattanooga / CARTA	Jill Hindman	Member
Chattanooga / CARTA	Kimberly Kinsey	Member
Chattanooga / CARTA	Edna Varner	Member
Chattanooga / CARTA	Warren Mackey	Member
Chattanooga / CARTA	Robert C. Diehl	Member
Lexington / Lextran	Terry Garcia Crews	Executive
Lexington / Lextran	Mary Fister	Chair
Lexington / Lextran	Ann Render	Vice Chair
Lexington / Lextran	Edward J. Kasarskis	Member
Lexington / Lextran	Jack Ballard	Member
Lexington / Lextran	Catherine Leslie	Member
Lexington / Lextran	Don Thornton	Member
Lexington / Lextran	Ted McCormick	Member
Lexington / Lextran	Priscilla Johnson	Member
Jackson / JTA	Johnny Gullett	Executive
Jackson / JTA	Donna Hodge	President
Jackson / JTA	Richard Donnell	Vice President
Jackson / JTA	Terry Wright	Member
Jackson / JTA	Clarence Boone	Member
Jackson / JTA	Rev. Lovell Hayes	Member

Table 2.4: Public Transportation Authority Executive Interview Questions

	Executive Question Structure
1	How long have you been general manager here? What was your transit experience before becoming GM?
2	Were you familiar with the authority board/executive-staff structure before you became GM? How has your actual experience with the board structure differed from what you expected?
3	Do you think the structure of the authority (how it is organized) and its responsibilities have helped or hurt your ability to accomplish your goals and ideas? In what ways? Do you have some examples?
4	What role does the board play in the financial aspects of the authority? Has this changed at all since you became involved in the system? In what ways?
5	Do you think the board should have more influence over budgetary and spending issues? If yes, in what ways? What impact do you think this would have? If no, why not?
6	Overall, do you think the board is effective? Why or why not? Are there issues or duties that the board is particularly good or bad at? What are they and why are they good/bad at them? What do you think would make the board more effective?
7	How would you describe the influence of the board in your city's political landscape? What would make the board more influential? What are the biggest obstacles to making the board perform at its highest level?
8	Have you seen board members bring specific agendas to the table because they are representing a particular group or idea? How often does this conflict with your goals?
9	How would you describe your relationship with the board? At present, do you have any particularly good or bad relationships with the members?
10	Do you think the board wishes it could be more involved in decision-making for the system's operation? What do you think they wish they could do/what kinds of things do they try and get involved in?
11	How often do you involve board members in making decisions related to managing the transit system? How do you include them? What are some specific examples?
12	Is there anything else—ideas or opinions—that you have pondered or discussed with other executives, your staff or board members which might shed light on the board-executive relationship?

Table 2.5: Public Transportation Authority Board Member Interview Questions

	Board Member Question Structure
1	How long have you been serving on the authority? What in your background prepared you for this position? Was this your first foray into public service?
2	Why did you decide to serve on the authority board? When you began serving, what was your focus?
3	What are the duties and responsibilities of the board? Are there any responsibilities in which you wish the board had more power and influence?
4	What role does the board play in the financial aspects of the authority? Have you seen the financial authority of the board increase or decrease since you began serving on the board? In what ways?
5	Do you think the board should have more influence over budgetary and spending issues? (if yes) What kinds of things would you like to be able to influence? What impact do you think this would have? (if no) Why not? Do you think resources are being obt
6	How would you describe the influence of the board in your city's political landscape? What would make the board more influential?
7	In your role as a board member, on whose behalf are you acting? Is there a particular group you feel you are speaking and voting for?
8	How would you describe your relationship with the general manager? Do you think he/she has this same relationship with most other board members?
9	Do you think he is an effective general manager of the transit system? Are you supportive of the job he's/she's doing?
10	As a board member, how often are you involved in making decisions related to managing the transit system? What are some examples of where you have been included in the decisions?
11	Are there times where you-as a board member-wish you could be more involved in decision-making for the system's operation? What are some examples?
12	12. Is there anything else—ideas or opinions—that you have pondered or discussed with other board member or the general manager which might shed light on the board-executive relationship?

Council's Sphere

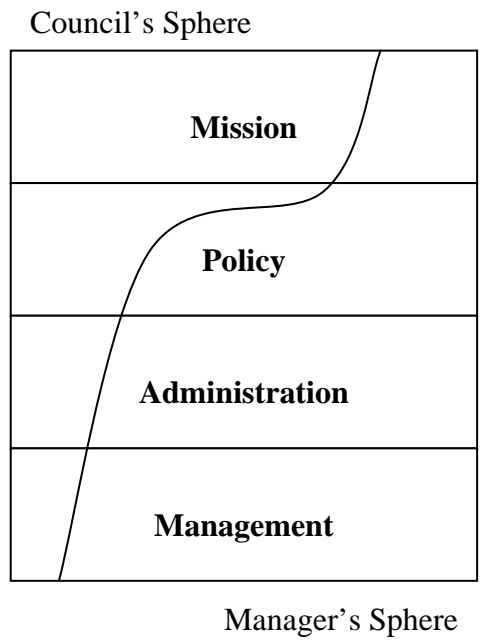|	
Mission	
Policy	
Administration	
Management	

Manager's Sphere

Figure 6.1: Dimensions of the Governmental Process: Council-Manager Structure with Mission Management Separation and Shared Responsibility for Policy and the Administration

Source: Adapted from James H. Svara. Dichotomy and Duality: Reconceptualizing the Relationship Between Policy and Administration in Council-Manager Cities. *Public Administration Review* 45: 221-232, Figure 2. 1985.
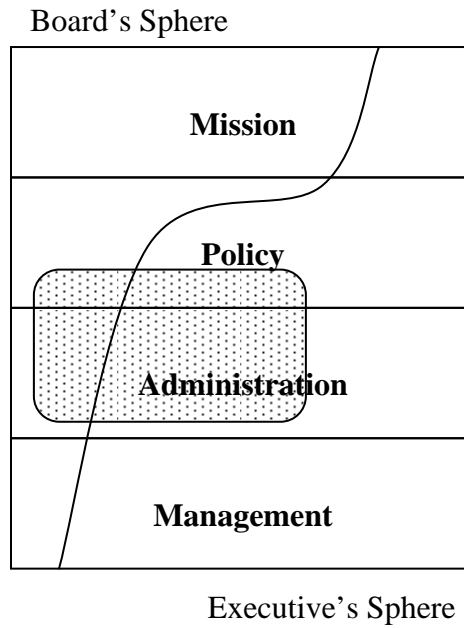
Board's Sphere

Executive's Sphere
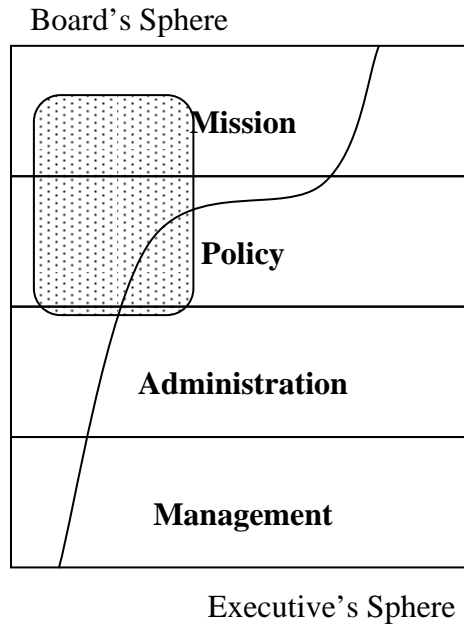
Figure 6.2: Dimensions of the Governmental Process: Policy-Oriented, Broad Focused Board Member Preferences

Source: Adapted from James H. Svara. Dichotomy and Duality: Reconceptualizing the Relationship Between Policy and Administration in Council-Manager Cities. *Public Administration Review* 45: 221-232, Figure 2. 1985.
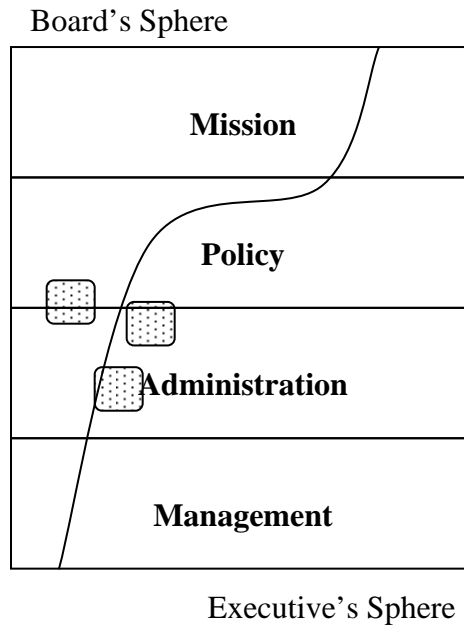
Board's Sphere
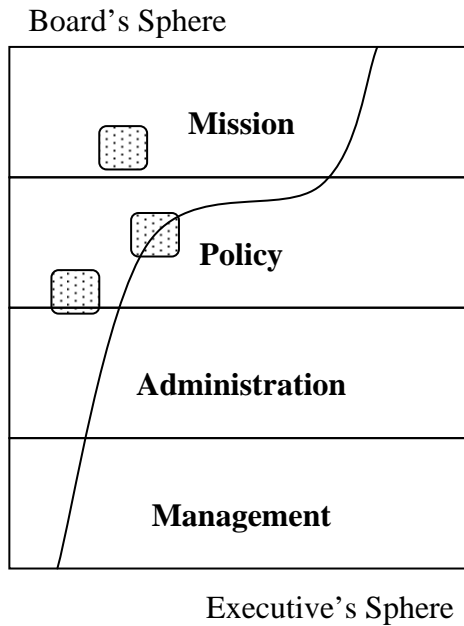
Figure 6.3: Dimensions of the Governmental Process: Policy-Oriented, Narrow Focused Board Member Preferences

Source: Adapted from James H. Svara. Dichotomy and Duality: Reconceptualizing the Relationship Between Policy and Administration in Council-Manager Cities. *Public Administration Review* 45: 221-232, Figure 2. 1985.
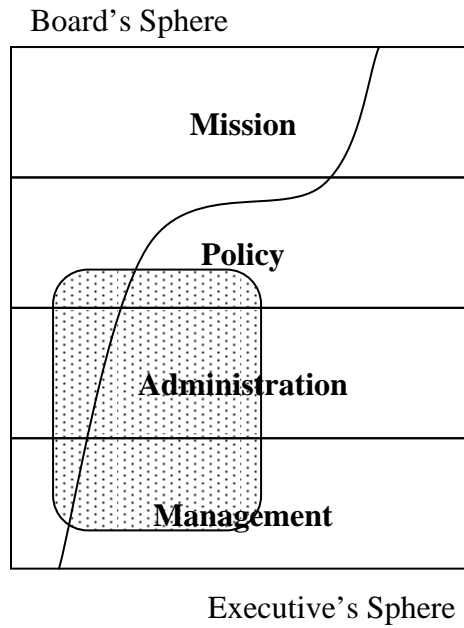
Board's Sphere

Figure 6.4: Dimensions of the Governmental Process: Advisory-Oriented, Broad Focused Board Member Preferences

Source: Adapted from James H. Svara. Dichotomy and Duality: Reconceptualizing the Relationship Between Policy and Administration in Council-Manager Cities. *Public Administration Review* 45: 221-232, Figure 2. 1985.

Board's Sphere

Figure 6.5: Dimensions of the Governmental Process: Advisory-Oriented, Narrow Focused Board Member Preferences

Board's Sphere

Executive's Sphere

Figure 6.6: Dimensions of the Governmental Process: Community-Oriented, Broad Focused Board Member Preferences

Source: Adapted from James H. Svara. Dichotomy and Duality: Reconceptualizing the Relationship Between Policy and Administration in Council-Manager Cities. *Public Administration Review* 45: 221-232, Figure 2. 1985.
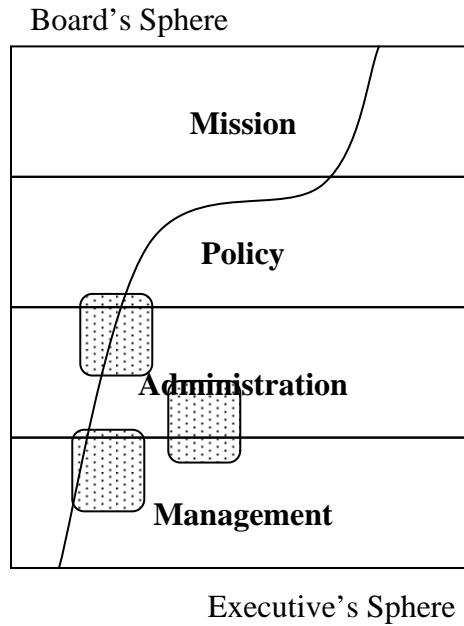
Board's Sphere

Figure 6.7: Dimensions of the Governmental Process: Community-Oriented,
Narrow Focused Board Member Preferences

VITAE

Robert August Schneider was born in Lyon's Park, Florida on June 3, 1975 and moved with his family to Melbourne, Florida where he attended the public schools. He graduated from Melbourne High School in 1993 and then Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina in 1997. Graduating with distinction in majors of Political Science and History, he entered the Graduate School of The University of Tennessee in Knoxville and began coursework in political science and public administration.

Earning a Masters of Public Administration in 2000, he was recognized as "Public Administration Student of the Year" by the East Tennessee Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration, since serving the chapter on the council and as vice president. Also in 2000, Mr. Schneider continued his study in the Department of Political Science's Doctor of Philosophy program and began his public transportation career. Accepting a senior director position at Knoxville Area Transit, he has broadly expanded his understanding of public administration theory as a practitioner, achieving the position of Chief Operating Officer while completing his graduate study. During his tenure, Knoxville Area Transit received the American Public Transportation Association's, "System of the Year" award for 2004, the highest distinction offered by the industry.

In December 2006, Mr. Schneider was awarded the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Political Science and in addition to his public transportation career has served as a graduate teaching assistant and term lecturer for the Department of Political Science and research ambassador for the Transit Cooperative Research Program of the Transportation Research Board of the National Academy of Sciences. He has published in *Public Administration Theory and Praxis* and is an established public transportation researcher.