

1. OBJECTIVES AND NEED FOR ASSISTANCE

1.a. THE PROBLEM

Within the largely rural region that surrounds the City of Ithaca and which extends well beyond the boundaries of Tompkins County, there exist few alternatives to the automobile as a mode of travel. Thus, accessibility for those without access to an automobile is severely circumscribed. Moreover, automobile travel accounts for a large portion of the consumption of oil. As automobile ownership continues to become increasingly expensive and energy supplies continue to be threatened, the absence of viable transportation alternatives possesses considerable potential for damage to the welfare of the region's population and its economy.

The Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Commission was established in August 1976 in response to the public's recognition of this significant problem. It was created by the Tompkins County Board of Representatives "to prepare a comprehensive multi-modal transportation plan for Tompkins County, to promote coordination of transportation planning and programming, and to provide a vehicle to promote the facilitation of appropriate transportation projects."* The commission's mission was endorsed by all municipalities within the County.

*"Agreement to participate in the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Commission," August 3, 1976, p.1.

Other agencies and organizations within Tompkins County also have identified the necessity for expanded transportation services in their needs assessment studies. The Tompkins County Office for the Aging, the Tompkins County Economic Opportunity Corporation, the Human Services Coalition, and the United Way each have defined transportation as a high priority for their respective target populations. The Industrial Satisfaction Survey of local employers also has identified transportation as a critical issue.

Transportation needs within Tompkins County and the multi-county Tompkins County Economic Region have been thoroughly documented within the Interim County-wide Public Transportation Service Plan (see Part V). Briefly, these may be summarized as follows:

- (1) Of the 87,000 residents within Tompkins County, about 55,000 have no access to public transportation of any kind. Population growth has been greatest in areas with little or no service.
- (2) About 20 percent of the County's residents are "transportation disadvantaged," being elderly, disabled, or poor. Low income populations, in particular, tend to reside in rural areas with no transportation services.
- (3) Over 25 percent of the County's population attends college. Improved access to Cornell (16,000+ students) and Ithaca College (4,500+ students) could help alleviate a housing shortage within the Ithaca urban area. Improved transportation to Tompkins-Cortland Community College (TC3) (3,200 students) would help TC3 satisfy its mission.
- (4) Many employees within Tompkins County commute long distances to work from areas with little access to public transportation. Money spent on transportation has grown disproportionately to other components of the household budget, reducing the real disposable income of the region's population, particularly rural residents.
- (5) Employers within Tompkins County and neighboring counties draw from a multi-county labor pool. High transportation costs associated with poor access to public transportation constricts the supply of available labor. Access to an expanded labor pool may become an important factor in maintaining and expanding employment within the entire Tompkins County Economic Region.
- (6) Increased commutation to, from, and through the Ithaca urban area has created considerable pressure upon the County's road system. Traffic funneling into the downtown area during peak periods produces congestion, noise, dangerous conditions, and even pollution within Ithaca, a city that

has striven actively to create a vital and attractive urban core for the region. These traffic conditions are neither compatible with the city's objectives nor do they contribute to safety and health. By providing attractive transportation alternatives to the single occupant private auto, these effects may be reduced.

- (7) So long as no comprehensive program exists to provide transportation services for residents within Tompkins County and the broader economic region surrounding it, no contingency plan for emergency transportation in the event of a severe fuel crisis can be readily implemented.

The seriousness of such needs as those described above will depend upon the very volatile prospects related to energy within the United States. As the costs and availability of fuel become increasingly problematical, the need for improved transportation services will continue to grow and may perhaps eventually reach crisis proportions.