A Brief History of U.S. Transportation Policy and Planning

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It is often said that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. In the case of transportation planning and policy development in the U.S., it is essential to understand where we have been so that we know where we are going as a profession. The U.S. government’s role in the development of transportation policy and investments in transportation infrastructure has evolved from very limited in the early days of the Republic to a comprehensive $305 billion policy bill that was signed by President Obama in December 2015. Starting in the early 1960s, new Federal initiatives for transportation planning emerged, creating a new field of study that combined transportation engineering, regional planning, geography, and public policy with the aim of providing a comprehensive approach to solving traffic problems in cities. This colloquium provides a brief history of transportation policy and the practice of transportation planning in the U.S. from Colonial times to the present day.

Dr. Ben Sperry is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at the Russ College of Engineering and Technology at Ohio University. Dr. Sperry’s research focuses on using innovative analysis techniques to examine traveler behavior and measure traveler responses to different policy initiatives with a goal of informing decision-making on transportation improvements across all modes of travel. Specific research interests include multimodal passenger and freight transportation planning and policy, site planning and traffic impact analysis, and travel survey methods for transportation planning, and environmental analysis. Dr. Sperry received a Ph.D. in Civil Engineering in 2012 from Texas A&M University. Prior to joining Ohio University in 2013, Dr. Sperry was a researcher in the Multimodal Freight Transportation Systems program of the Texas A&M Transportation Institute.