LEADING ACROSS FRONTIERS: HOW VISIONARY LEADERS INTEGRATE PEOPLE, PROCESSES, STRUCTURES AND RESOURCES

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Within collaborations aimed at solving complex public problems, leadership is clearly important in achieving successful outcomes (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2006; Ansell and Gash 2008). We are especially interested in better understanding how leaders work across sectoral, organizational and cultural boundaries to bring diverse groups of people together to work out sustainable remedies for such problems. We see the leadership practice of these leaders as integrative - that is, they help organizations integrate people, processes, structures and resources in semi-permanent ways. Integration is similar to collaboration, but we think the former term captures more directly the need for leaders and constituents to move back and forth across boundaries and build linking pathways and other commonalities.

This chapter explores the visionary practices of integrative leaders in a collaborative transportation initiative in the Minneapolis-St Paul region of the United States (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2008). The focus is on visionary leadership practices because they are vital to helping diverse stakeholders develop a shared understanding of a public problem and potential solutions, as well as commit to work for new policy regimes (Crosby and Bryson 2005a). The chapter weaves together three theoretical strands - leadership, collaboration and cross-boundary work - to supply the basic fabric of our analysis. To begin, we explain our research design - including the theoretical strands, definitions and methods. The following section describes the Urban Partnership program developed in recent years by the US Department of Transportation (USDOT), and details the successful effort of a group of Minnesota transportation officials, local governments and policy advocates to secure one of the major grants (Urban Partnership Agreements or UPAs) awarded through the program. We then offer findings about how visionary leaders helped diverse stakeholders develop shared
understandings and commitments that allowed the group successfully to compete for and implement an Urban Partnership project. Finally, we present lessons and conclusions.

**Research design: theory and methodology**

In order to understand how leaders exercised visionary leadership in this case, we draw theoretical strands from several bodies of work: Crosby and Bryson's work on how leaders inspire and mobilize diverse constituents to tackle complex public problems in shared-power environments where no one is wholly in charge (Crosby and Bryson 2005a, 2005b); Huxham and Vangen (2005) and their colleagues' studies of collaboration; and our own review of the literature on cross-sector collaboration (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2006). We also consider the role of boundary objects, boundary experiences and boundary groups (Carlile 2002, 2004; Feldman et al. 2006; Kellogg, Orlikowski and Yates 2006; and Bryson, Crosby and Bryson 2009), and the role of technology (Orlikowski 2000) in facilitating the creation and maintenance of multi-stakeholder, multi-sector collaborations. (The attention to technology emerged from our study of the Urban Partnership case, because computer-assisted “intelligent transportation systems” were a key component.)

Our initial research on this case was aimed at testing and refining our cross-sector collaboration framework (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2006) and understanding more concretely the factors that affect the success of cross-sector collaborations. The results of that research are reported in “Collaboration in Fighting Traffic Congestion: A Study of Minnesota’s Urban Partnership Agreement” (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2008). We explain our case-development methods after an in-depth consideration of our theoretical fabric.

**Theoretical strands**

Crosby and Bryson's *Leadership for the Common Good* framework is the organizing strand for this study. Strands focusing on cross-sector collaboration and cross-boundary work are woven in as we seek to illumine leadership aspects of this particular case of collaborative public problem-solving.

**Leadership for the common good**

Crosby and Bryson (2005) emphasize the importance of, and interconnections between, *visionary, political* and *ethical* leadership practices for helping diverse stakeholders make sense of a public problem, commit to doing something about it, obtain needed policy and implementation decisions, and enforce new shared-power arrangements. These practices are linked
Figure 12.1 The triple three-dimensional view of power. From Crosby, B. and Bryson, J. (2005) Leadership for the Common Good. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 409

together in a multi-dimensional view of power (Figure 12.1) that highlights the creation and communication of meaning in formal and informal forums (the main practice of visionary leadership), policy-making and implementation in formal and informal arenas (the main practice of political leadership), and conflict resolution and normative regulation in formal and informal courts (the main practice of ethical leadership). Each of the practices has three dimensions: (1) observable action; (2) the rules, modes, media, methods that underpin action; and (3) the taken-for-granted, deep social structures of language and meaning (Crosby and Bryson 2005a; Giddens 1979, 1984).

We argue that, in order to operate effectively in environments in which the power to resolve a public problem is dispersed among many individuals, groups and organizations, leaders should direct their attention and energies to the middle dimension – that is, the rules, media and modes that draw on the deep structures in the third dimension and shape observable action in the first dimension. An especially important element of the middle dimension is the design of formal and informal forums, arenas and courts, the social settings in which observable action occurs. We argue that, in pursuing the common good, visionary leaders emphasize the design and use of forums, political leaders emphasize the design and use of arenas, and ethical leaders emphasize the design and use of courts.
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Thus, visionary leaders who wish to develop common understanding or meaning around traffic congestion would focus on the rules, media and modes that shape communication in formal and informal forums. Perhaps they decide to hold a workshop highlighting different perspectives on traffic congestion. They will establish rules to ensure that some people are speaking during the debate and others are not. They will structure the workshop agenda and perhaps require that ideas be presented in a certain format. They will develop an invitation list and strategies for ensuring that certain people are or are not in the audience. They will use methods that winnow and synthesize disparate ideas.

Cross-sector collaboration

In addition to arguing for the necessity of visionary, political and ethical leadership for remedying complex public problems, we argue that remedying complex public problems is likely to involve cross-sector collaboration of some sort (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2006), and thus leaders will need an understanding of what fosters successful cross-sector collaboration. Such collaborations are unlikely to get off the ground unless potential partners have some agreement on a need or opportunity that requires collaboration (Mattessich, Murray-Close and Monsey 2001). Collaborations are unlikely to get very far after that unless partners develop enough trust to continue working together, find ways to deal with power imbalances, cope with shifting membership, develop supportive processes and structures, and have a system of evaluating outcomes and fostering accountability (Winer and Ray 1994; Huxham and Vangen 2005; Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2006).

Our analysis of the literature on cross-sector collaborations indicated that initial conditions, process and structure, contingencies (such as power) and accountability mechanisms all have important effects on the formation, operation and outcomes of these initiatives (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2006) (see Figure 12.2). Initial conditions that seemed to contribute to the formation of collaborations included turbulence in the environment, history of sector failure, supportive politics, pre-existing formal and informal networks, and general agreement on a problem or opportunity that would be the focus of the collaboration. Crucial process components seemed to be methods of building and exercising leadership, creation of various initial agreements among collaborating partners, development of the collaboration’s legitimacy, creation and maintenance of trust, effective conflict management, and planning. Crucial structural components were governance arrangements, membership criteria and characteristics, and blend of hierarchy and network. Important contingencies included power imbalances and competing institutional logics. We concluded that a measure of cross-sector collaborations’ success is the extent to which they produce “public value”, a term coined by Mark Moore (1995) and which we define as fulfilling public purposes, mandates,
Figure 12.2 A framework for understanding leadership in cross-sector collaborations.
organizational missions and the expectations of the citizenry at reasonable cost. To construct a reliable picture of collaborations' outcomes, participants and analysts will need to rely on an accountability system that tracks inputs, processes and outcomes; uses a variety of methods for gathering, interpreting, and using data; and relies on strong relationships with key political and professional constituencies.

This chapter focuses on the process components, but also on their interaction with initial conditions, structure, contingencies and outcomes. Our questions specifically are: How do visionary leaders help collaborating partners from different sectors develop enough of a shared purpose to form the basis of initial agreements? How do they use planning processes to build shared understandings and commitments to craft and implement solutions? How do they use the design of settings (with their partially visible rules) to create a shared purpose and set of commitments, and to build trust, establish legitimacy and manage conflict? We think attention to the intermediate level of power – rules, modes, media and methods – can be very helpful in answering these questions, but we shall also use insights from the literature that emphasize the important role of boundary objects, boundary experiences and boundary groups in helping people connect with perspectives very different from their own and commit to a new, shared perspective. In this case, technology also appears to operate at the intermediate level of power as an integrative underpinning of observable action.

**Boundary experiences, objects and groups**

Boundary experiences are “shared or joint activities that create a sense of community and an ability to transcend boundaries among participants” (Feldman et al. 2006: 94; Feldman and Khademian 2007). UPA was forged out of the self-conscious design and use of such experiences; it continues, at least in part, because of them as well. Boundary objects are “physical objects that enable people to understand other perspectives” (Feldman et al. 2006: 95). Beyond that, boundary objects can facilitate the transformation of diverse views into shared knowledge and understanding (Carlile 2002; Kellogg, Orlikowski and Yates 2006). Attention to boundary objects first developed in a production or manufacturing context, where the objects were scale models or mockups, but since then the idea has been extended to include less material objects. Boundary objects and their development help participants make sense of their world, what they may want to do with it, and why; and, in doing so, the exercise helps participants connect people, ideas and other kinds of actors into a way forward. Said differently, boundary objects act as a kind of “transitional object” (Winnicott 1953) or “facilitative device” (de Geus 1988) from here-and-now real possibilities to the there-and-then actualities. Boundary objects may be used to deal with what Carlile (2004) calls “syntactical” problems, or incompatible
codes, routines or protocols; "semantic" problems, resulting from differences in meaning, assumptions or context; or "pragmatic" problems, caused by differing stakeholder interests that can be resolved only if people alter some of their existing knowledge or ways of doing things.

Boundary organizations or boundary groups are "collections of actors who are drawn together from different ways of knowing or bases of experience for the purpose of coproducing boundary actions" (Feldman et al. 2006: 95). Examples include cross-boundary networks, taskforces and teams; coordinating committees; and representative policy-making bodies. Minnesota's UPA is perhaps best-understood as a boundary organization; it is mostly a "virtual organization" comprised of many members, including the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Metro Transit (the regional transportation authority) and the City of Minneapolis, and a host of other organizations, groups and individuals participate.

Other theoretical threads

Theories about cross-cultural communication also may be important in this case, since cultures at the state and local level may be quite different from the culture of federal agencies. (Culture here refers to habitual ways of doing things, distinctive organizational and institutional rituals, core values, and routines and logics [Schein 2004].) The cultures of government agencies are likely to be quite different from those of nonprofits and business. A similar concept, "competing institutional logics", appears in organizational theory and neo-institutional views of the environment to emphasize the deep-seated and often contradictory norms and views of action embedded in the logics of bureaucracy, democracy, markets, and so forth (Friedland and Alford 1991).

Studies of collaboration have paid little attention to the role of computerized information technology in facilitating or hampering cross-sector collaboration. Orlikowski (2000) has offered a "practice lens" for studying technology in organizations, and we draw on her insights. Our analysis of the Minnesota UPA revealed that technology played several important roles: as its own driving force, as a solution, and as a motivator, facilitator and positive political force (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2008).

Case-study methodology

Our extended study of the Minnesota UPA project used a simplified version of the framework presented in Figure 12.2 to develop the questions we pose to those closely involved in advocacy, conceptualization and management of the implementation of the project. We conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty-six individuals involved in Minnesota's UPA. In selecting our sample, we paid careful attention to gaining perspectives from individual at multiple levels of government and with varying levels of responsibility.
and authority over the UPA implementation, including federal officials, state legislators, MnDOT and Metro Transit staff, policy advocates, legislators, and members of local transportation groups.

The interview protocol included questions related to the interviewee's background in the transportation field, the initial conditions leading up to the UPA collaboration, the structures and processes of decision-making, and the outcomes and accountability processes involved. A note-taker accompanied the interviewer to record the interviewee's comments verbatim on a laptop computer, and these notes were then imported into the qualitative analysis software program QSR NVivo.

Important to our design and analysis was feedback from key practitioners in the local transportation field. We convened an Advisory Group comprised of leaders from each of the primary UPA partnership organizations to provide feedback on our initial findings and draft reports. Archival newspaper articles and other publications formed the basis of a secondary data-collection effort focused on capturing the story of UPA development and implementation as reported by local newspapers and publications in the recipient states, with particular emphasis on the legislative and political processes necessary for successful implementation of the UPA policy.

We developed a thematic coding structure based on our original cross-sector collaboration paper, input from the Advisory Group, and discussion among research-team members. The software also allowed us to disaggregate thematic results into categories based on the characteristics of interview participants, such as their work affiliation and job title.

**Background of the Urban Partnership Agreement**

Traffic congestion in US metropolitan areas has become an exceedingly complex, or "wicked", problem in the last four decades. The habitual approach to solving the problem - building more freeways - increasingly ran into limitations in the form of citizen protest and competing demands on public budgets. Plus, when new or expanded freeways or other roads were built they often did not reduce congestion in the long run. Soon the new lanes were also clogged with traffic as more people moved into the areas and low-density development continued to spread outward from city centers. By the 1960s transportation analysts with economics training were beginning to argue that the only way actually to reduce traffic congestion was to price the use of the roads during peak hours of use. Referring to the laws of supply and demand, they argued that demand would go down if drivers had to pay for access. The analysts argued that some drivers would pay the fee, but others would take alternative, uncongested routes, vary their driving time, take the bus, or stay at home. By the 1990s, policy entrepreneurs were imagining integrated transportation systems that relied on congestion pricing, transit, a variety of advanced technologies, and telecommuting.
From the 1960s through the 1990s, the idea of using pricing to manage traffic congestion had difficulty getting off the ground. Feasibility studies and a few pilot projects were tried, but elected officials and citizens generally were not convinced that the approach would work. Citizens also objected to paying a fee for facilities they felt they had already funded through their taxes. By the late 1990s, however, congestion was getting even worse in many urban areas, and a greater number of public officials were realizing that they could not build their way out of the problem.

Within USDOT during the George W. Bush Administration, Tyler Duvall, assistant secretary for transportation policy, began working with a few other top transportation officials to move from researching congestion pricing to mounting larger-scale demonstrations. One of his key allies was Mary Peters, the then administrator of the Federal Highway Administration, but there were a number of others in the department, including Patrick DeCorla-Souza, who was a long-time advocate of congestion pricing. Duvall tried to convince USDOT Secretary Norm Mineta to make congestion pricing a federal priority. Initially, Mineta was skeptical but after a top-level strategy meeting in 2006 agreed to make the shift, and congestion pricing was included in the department’s 2006 Strategy Statement. Duvall, Peters, David Horner (the chief counsel of the Federal Transit Authority) and others then began designing a demonstration project to channel funding to major metropolitan areas that would tackle congestion with a set of complementary strategies called “the four Ts”: transit, technology, tolling and telecommuting. The designers thought that integrating the four strategies would provide the biggest payoff in terms of congestion pricing. They were able to secure about $120 million in departmental discretionary funds to put into what became known as the Urban Partnership project, which was designed to demonstrate whether congestion pricing had a clear positive impact. The plan was to create a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process that would result in approval of a few highly promising projects.

Soon, however, a much larger amount of money became available when Congress suspended its usual practice of allowing members to earmark transportation funds. As a result, the pot for the project eventually grew to $1.1 billion. In addition, Mary Peters became US Secretary of Transportation, allowing her to champion the program from the top position in the department.

In Minnesota, congestion pricing advocates, state and local officials, and transit supporters began discussing participation in the Urban Partnership program, officially announced at the end of 2006. Minnesota, after all, was the site of one of the country’s most successful congestion-pricing experiments, in the form of the MnPass project on highway I-394 – an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) application of dynamic pricing to a segment of I-394 in the western part of the Minneapolis-St Paul metropolitan region.
Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) officials decided, after some initial reluctance, to submit a proposal for an Urban Partnership grant in collaboration with the Metropolitan Council, which operates the bus transit system (Metro Transit) for the Minneapolis-St Paul region. Soon after, the Citizens League (a nonprofit public-policy study group focusing on Minneapolis-St Paul), the University of Minnesota’s Center for Transportation Studies, and the State and Local Policy Program at the university’s Humphrey Institute featured the Urban Partnership program at their Road Pricing Summit on 1 February 2007. It was here that Rick Arnebeck from MnDOT announced that the department would seek a UPA grant. Tyler Duvall also spoke at the summit.

MnDOT project leaders assembled an interagency Steering Committee to oversee the proposal development process. In addition to individuals from MnDOT and the Metropolitan Council, the committee over time grew to include local officials from highly congested traffic corridors, county officials, and University of Minnesota experts. MnDOT hired SRF Consulting Group to prepare the actual grant proposal. John Doan of SRF played a key role in the drafting process; he was a former MnDOT employee who had worked on congestion pricing while there.

Since the proposal was due at the end of April, the Steering Committee members knew that they had to obtain agreement among numerous state and local parties about the main components of the proposal. For example: In which locations would congestion pricing be applied? What form would it take? What would be the implications for bus services and routing? What technological innovations would be emphasized? What role would telecommuting play?

The committee organized a half-day workshop in March and several subsequent meetings to help numerous stakeholders consider possible answers to these questions and develop a consensus about what should be included in the proposal. Additionally, project supporters worked behind the scenes to make sure that powerful legislators, the governor and the lieutenant governor would support the form of tolling that would be included in the Minnesota UPA proposal.

At times, project advocates worried that disagreements about proposal components would sink the effort, but eventually the Steering Committee and outside advocates obtained enough consensus and compromise to be able to submit a strong proposal, focusing on the I-35W corridor south of Minneapolis and on downtown Minneapolis bus routes that linked to the corridor. Minnesota’s proposal was selected as one of the nine semi-finalists announced by USDOT in June. The semi-finalists then were invited to present their plans to USDOT, and in August the nine were winnowed to five finalists – Minneapolis, Seattle, New York, San Francisco and Miami. (In the spring of 2008, New York would drop out, and Los Angeles and Chicago would be added.)
The total UPA grant to Minnesota was $133.3 million to be matched with $55.2 million in funds from the state legislature and Metropolitan Council. In addition to approving the match, state legislators would also have to approve tolling authority for the I-35W corridor. The UPA partners had approximately one year to assemble all components of the implementation plan.

Once Minnesota was chosen as a finalist, the UPA Steering Committee went into implementation mode. It became a smaller, more operations-oriented group, and MnDOT put Nick Thompson, operations manager, in charge of day-to-day oversight of the operational aspects of the project. At the same time, the Metropolitan Council transit officials and local government partners began working on their pieces of the project, while legislators and MnDOT senior officials worked on legislative strategy. Ultimately, the 2008 session of the Minnesota Legislature approved the required state matching funds as well as needed MnDOT authority for implementing the UPA.

How sponsors and champions exercised visionary leadership in the UPA case

Two main types of leaders — sponsors and champions — seem necessary for carrying out successful collaborative efforts to tackle public problems (Crosby and Bryson 2005a). Sponsors bring formal authority, financial resources and legitimacy to the endeavors. Champions typically bring tireless commitment, networking skills and often significant informal authority. They are willing to take risks in the service of potential payoff. They understand the policy-change process and take a long view. In this case, federal-level champions and sponsors worked together to construct the Urban Partnership program, and state and local champions and sponsors put together Minnesota's successful campaign to obtain and implement a UPA. Among the federal leaders, Mary Peters was initially a champion and became a sponsor. Tyler Duvall, Patrick DeCorla-Souza and David Horner were champions. In Minnesota, champions included Lee Munnich, Adeel Lari, Bob DeBoer, members of the I-35W Solutions Alliance (consisting of local officials in the 35W corridor) and a MnDOT middle manager. Senior executives at MnDOT and Metro Transit were important sponsors.

Our analysis focuses on how these champions and sponsors exercised visionary leadership in a way that integrated stakeholders, processes, structures and resources from different sectors and governmental levels to tackle a shared problem. As noted earlier, visionary leaders do the crucial work of helping constituents make sense of a public problem and commit to doing something about it. As these leaders assemble collaborations, they focus on developing agreement on the collaboration's purpose or mission, and securing commitment to producing and implementing strategies for carrying it out. In carrying out this work, visionary leaders emphasize the social
practice of creating and communicating shared meaning in formal and informal forums.

Visionary leadership comprises three main tasks: interpreting the need or opportunity and giving direction about how to respond to it, offering compelling visions of the future, and adeptly designing and using formal and informal forums. Let us now consider the processes by which sponsors and champions in this case carried out those tasks in ways that integrated different government units and levels and government and nongovernment partners.

Seizing opportunities to provide interpretation and direction

Visionary leaders help make public problems real through a problem-definition process: they make social needs and opportunities visible, detail their causes and consequences, and frame them in ways that appeal to diverse stakeholders. They also engage in solution-seeking processes, chiefly eliciting and championing new ideas for dealing with the problems.

Making societal needs or opportunities visible

In this case, existence of the problem of urban traffic congestion was fairly widely known. Highway-users experienced the problem daily, government officials fielded complaints about it, academic and government reports detailed its pervasiveness and costs, and public-opinion surveys often put it high on the list of citizen concerns (Metropolitan Council 2007).

Detailing causes and consequences

Citizens and analysts alike tend to agree that a major factor in urban traffic congestion is too much reliance on cars and (possibly) highways and land-use patterns, especially urban sprawl. This discussion has been going on for decades.

In the interviews conducted for our UPA study, analysts at the federal level also pointed to the existence of federal transportation programs (and funding) in separate silos, marked "highways", "buses", "intelligent transportation systems" and "non-motorized transport". Analysts also realized that these arrangements provided little incentive for state and local transportation agencies and decision-makers to coordinate their work. Comprehensive and coordinated planning to ease a multi-faceted problem like congestion was difficult indeed. A more behind-the-scenes concern within USDOT was that federal highway programs in particular were not focused and data-driven.

The at-least-partially-shared problem diagnosis lowered barriers among prospective UPA partners in Minnesota. All agreed that urban congestion
was bad and getting worse. They did focus on different parts of the problem: legislators tended to see the congestion located in their districts; the I-35W Solutions Alliance was fighting against congestion in a particular highway corridor. The Minnesota partners had enough agreement on the problem and the shared mission of remedying it that they could work together, in keeping with Huxham’s finding that collaborations can proceed without complete agreement on aims (Huxham 2003).

Framing the problem and solutions

Stakeholders, including the general public, generally agreed that traffic congestion was a public problem and that therefore government has some responsibility for doing something about it. Government reports, citizen surveys, media accounts and scholarly reports portrayed traffic congestion as a public bad because of widespread and multiple harmful effects: pollution, personal stress, economic toll. An example would be the Critical Issues in Transportation report published by the Transportation Research Board (2007), a division of the nonprofit National Research Council.

As noted above, federal transportation analysts and other anti-congestion campaigners had begun to argue that congestion was a complex problem that required comprehensive integrated solutions. A fragmented approach was characterized as failure-prone, and an integrated approach was deemed potentially very effective. The integrative frame was expressed in the linking of the “4 Ts” (tolling, transit, technology and telecommuting) in the grant application process and public proclamations about it.

Money also helped convey the idea of an integrated system across boundaries. In the Road Pricing Summit sponsored by the Citizens League and in follow-up informal conversations, people who were not necessarily attracted to pricing or the 4-T idea did respond to the lure of major federal funding. The funding conveyed a sense of legitimacy (federal officials are willing to put big money behind this idea) and it also promised significant impact. This promise helped motivate potential partners to begin thinking how to align their goals and favored projects with what federal officials were proposing. It also helped overcome resistance from transportation-planners concerned about the possible need to rethink projects already underway. Additionally, Minnesota partners needed incentives to accept the risk that they would sink time and effort into something (the UPA grant application) that might not succeed. In other words, the large size of the grant was a powerful inducement (Stone 2002). Perhaps the use of the word partnership had positive impact in that it conveyed a sense that federal officials were willing to let state and local applicants come up with program specifics and that they would stay involved as the projects went forward.

Additionally, what might be called a transportation corridor frame had become a familiar way of thinking about transportation projects –
transportation planners and policy-makers had begun to think beyond rebuilding a highway or establishing a bus route, to considering the ways various modes of travel operated together in a corridor that included at least one major traffic route and feeder routes. The corridor idea helped link together modes and stakeholders along the corridor.

The prospect of integrating advanced technology throughout the project helped stakeholders see the UPA as an exciting opportunity to innovate. As one interviewee stated, people are attracted by the possibility of being innovators, because “[i]t’s exciting to implement new technology”. Another added that an incentive for MnDOT was “another opportunity to be cutting edge”. The UPA was therefore a technology-assisted motivating or attractor force (Allen and Cherney 2000).

A sticking point was the framing of tolling as a “public bad”. The very word “tolling” has a negative connotation for many citizens. They object to paying tolls for something they see as a public good. They argue: “I’ve paid for the highway with my taxes. Why should I pay again?” The supporters of “tolling” or “pricing” in this case tried to replace this negative frame with a positive “public good” frame. Tax dollars, they suggested, simply guarantee that highways are universally available on demand as long as their capacity is not exceeded. After that users might legitimately pay a price for access to free-flowing lanes. Moreover, thanks to transponder technology, that price can be carefully calibrated to respond to high demand or peak periods. In effect, free flow becomes worth more when more people want it. The label “dynamic pricing” captured this argument.

Pricing advocates still had to overcome the perception that charging for the use of one or more lanes was taking those lanes away or subtracting capacity from the system. They countered that pricing actually increased the numbers of cars that a highway can accommodate. This argument is somewhat less straightforward than the argument for pricing. One advocate used the analogy of pouring rice into an hourglass; that is, if many grains of rice are poured rapidly into an hourglass they will soon overwhelm the capacity of the narrow neck, and almost no grains will get through after a certain point in time. Yet if the rate of entry is slowed enough, which presumably pricing would do, all the grains will get through. Advocates quite literally did this; in other words, they used the rice and hourglass as a boundary object to facilitate shared knowledge and understanding. Demonstration projects – such as MnPass on I-394, and the Stockholm and London experiences – that show the beneficial effects of pricing were also crucial for making this less-than-intuitive argument stick.

Championing new ideas for dealing with the problems

Congestion pricing was a relatively new idea for some stakeholders. The effectiveness of its use outside the US and in a few places inside the US helped
champions make their case to different stakeholder groups. Effectiveness or efficiency arguments appeal across sectors and government levels. The idea of integration seemed to help as well. Supporters of telecommuting, bus rapid transit, congestion pricing and “intelligent systems” could all see how their favored part of the congestion solution could be advanced but also enhanced by being meshed with other solutions within the UPA program. Making funding contingent on an integrated UPA grant application was a means that federal transportation officials used to ensure that this idea would have traction. The federal designers of the UPA program also built in funding and mandates for evaluation so that the program appealed to rational planning advocates.

Federal and state champions had gotten their tolling idea fully developed in preparation for the policy window (Kingdon 1995) that opened when traffic congestion emerged as a priority transportation-policy focus in the final two years of the Bush administration, and the transportation secretary picked up substantial discretionary funding because of the impasse over earmarking. They instituted a competitive process that required complementary, silo-busting strategies and “forced creative thinking”, as one interviewee said. They even took a bit of comfort from any resistance they encountered – they interpreted it as a sign of innovativeness. Meanwhile, the RFP, competitive grant process was a well-known routine for most players. So it fitted within their normal frames of reference.

Perhaps in their enthusiasm for alliteration, the federal policy entrepreneurs slipped up. In Minnesota, tolling raised the hackles of the governor, many legislators, and citizens. Paying to use a road already paid for by taxes seemed anathema to them. Indeed, any tolling on Minnesota highways had to be expressly permitted by the state legislature. Arguments that congestion pricing added capacity were not enough to win the governor’s support. To win him over, the assemblers of Minnesota’s UPA application had to apply dynamic pricing to a shoulder lane, so that existing lanes were not “taken away” by tolling. Now the shoulder lane idea is being considered in other states. Meanwhile, USDOT decision-makers had to be willing to move away from their desire to price existing lanes, if they were to approve the Minnesota application. They ultimately selected Minnesota as a UPA finalist because transportation agencies in the state had a reputation for competence, plus success with congestion pricing, and thus federal officials viewed them as legitimate and trustworthy partners.

Technological advances made “dynamic pricing” possible as a solution to traffic congestion and allowed motorists to use transponders rather than toll booths to pay. According to one interviewee, technology allows “road pricing without significant transaction costs”. He also noted that technology improves transit services because it allows “buses to travel with shorter headways” and makes transit service more predictable and reliable by, for example, providing “real-time” traveler information. All of this enhances the
attractiveness of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and “thereby creates a virtuous cycle for transit – the more appeal, the more demand for it, the greater the frequency with which it’s provided, the better the economies of scale, the lower the cost per traveler [and therefore the more demand for it]”.

**Offering compelling visions of the future**

Sponsors and champions engage in translation and construction processes as they attempt to make an alternative future “real” in the minds of constituents. To be persuasive, they must translate abstract ideas like congestion pricing into accessible and appealing words and imagery that can provide a clear pathway from current conditions to a desirable future. Elements of the path and the future state must be constructed or woven together in a plausible and compelling way. In this case, the vision communicated explicitly and implicitly by sponsors and champions of the UPA program included smooth-flowing highways on which substantial numbers of vehicles use transponders to take advantage of priced lanes, technologically sophisticated side-boarding buses operate a lot like light rail trains, commuters continually are fed up-to-date information about travel times, park-and-ride facilities are available, new commercial and residential development springs up around bus hubs, and more people use the Internet to work from home or hook up to carpools. The vision was communicated through verbal imagery, cross-boundary objects (like the RFP, drawings, maps and reports) and groups (like Minnesota’s UPA Steering Committee) that made it potentially real and thus believable. This may be where trust comes in – perhaps visionary leaders foster shared interpretation of others’ motives, competencies and commitments.

**Designing and using formal and informal forums**

Structure and process come together in the design and use of formal and informal forums, the settings in which leaders and constituents engage in the dialogue, discussion and debate that may result in shared understandings of public problems and solutions – in this case, urban traffic congestion and integrated arrangements of transit, tolling, technology and telecommuting. UPA sponsors and champions put together a number of cross-boundary forums at the national, state, regional and local levels. For example, in January 2006 about eighty leaders of transportation agencies that comprise USDOT participated in an offsite planning retreat, where they identified metropolitan highway congestion as the nation’s biggest transportation problem deserving priority. An urban congestion working group was formed to come up with an action plan in sixty days. In these high-level forums, an economics/pricing frame was defensible because congestion-pricing initiatives had succeeded in the US and abroad and because other solutions clearly were
not having much effect. What emerged from these forums was the vision of an integrated system, branded with the “4 Ts” label. The “4 T” label was itself a kind of boundary object, or at least a summary term that carried somewhat shared meaning across audiences.

Once the UPA program was defined, federal and local champions used follow-up forums to alert potential applicants to the program’s existence and its potential to provide significant remedies for the problem. Bridging across the boundaries between national and local was facilitated by the existence of individuals and groups in the Minneapolis-St Paul area who had participated in national transportation forums, supported and publicized Minnesota’s successful MnPass program, and shared the economics pricing frame. Some had worked together on corridor projects. Some MTA and MnDOT employees had collaborated as partners in a group called Team Transit. Several interviewees pointed to the pre-existing relationships among stakeholders as being a key contributor to their willingness to get involved in shaping the UPA. This finding reinforced our previous study (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2006) indicating that pre-existing networks and relationships were an important initial condition affecting the formation of cross-sector collaborations.

Stakeholder forums convened during Minnesota’s application process included disparate groups, and facilitators used methods designed to foster inclusion and balance power. The I-35W Solutions Alliance was powerful in these settings because members had their act together. A sense of urgency was supplied by the short timelines that USDOT had imposed for submitting Urban Partnership applications. Agreements from these forums and Steering Committee meetings solidified into the actual grant application.

Forums may be thought of as structures that mediate between deep social structures such as language and observable action such as the debate and discussion that occurs in a workshop. Forums convened as part of a cross-sector collaboration are shaped by and also facilitate collaborative processes to carry out the work of the collaboration. They can be boundary experiences, produce boundary objects and often result in formation of boundary groups, such as taskforces and steering committees. Recalling the syntactical, semantic and pragmatic functions of boundary objects, we conclude that syntax was not much of an issue in this case, since most of the partners, regardless of their government level or sector, spoke “transportation-ese”. They did have semantic differences – for example, over tolling or intermodal approaches. They had to work out what integration across modes meant. They had to grapple with how much change would be needed if different professional groups associated with different modes had to work together. Pragmatics would require building a coalition, and boundary objects could be something around which people could coalesce and make their own meaning and align their interests. The proposal that was submitted and won contained all of these elements. Supporters quite literally had to agree on
the syntax in the proposal; they had to agree on what the words meant; and the proposal itself represented a shared agreement or treaty that reconciled interests and committed the signers to alter some of what they knew and how they would do things.

Another important boundary object was the USDOT request for proposal (RFP), eliciting applications for the UPA program. The RFP was a boundary object that conveyed meaning from federal officials to state and local applicants. The RFP addressed the syntactical, semantic and pragmatic problems inside USDOT, and then presented applicants with the need to solve the same problems in their proposals, which the Minnesota proposal did, as did the final agreement between Minnesota and USDOT. Understanding the proposal and RFP as boundary objects adds to our previous finding that forging sound initial agreements is an important process element in cross-sector collaborations (Crosby and Bryson 2005a; Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2006).

Planners of stakeholder forums during the formulation of Minnesota’s UPA application used what Lee Munnich calls a “grassroots” approach. They invited stakeholders from local governments, state agencies, regional government agencies, academic programs and nonprofit advocates. They did not extend their invitation to the grassroots—commuters or residents surrounding candidate corridors. This approach, used successfully in planning for MnPass, kept disagreements among stakeholder groups from expanding much beyond the forums themselves. It also was probably appropriate for the tight timeline that UPA applicants had for obtaining consensus among key stakeholders about the contours of the proposed project. A more problematic result is that UPA implementers will need to invest time and effort in selling their vision to the wider population expected to use the new integrated system.

Communications technology provided important, though less visible, cross-boundary forums. Telephone conversations obviously were important; but one interviewee also noted that, without email and the ability to include attachments, the proposal could not have been done on time. From this perspective, the Internet and email also may be seen as media for assembling and revising boundary objects.

Using political leadership on behalf of the vision

As noted earlier, political leadership—the making and implementing of policy decisions in formal and informal arenas—is a necessary concomitant of visionary leadership aimed at tackling complex public problems. The most important process is building a sustainable coalition that can convince decision-makers to approve proposed policies and that can protect them during implementation. Structure and process come together in the design and use of arenas, the settings in which policy advocates vie with each other to obtain desired decisions from executive, legislative and administrative decision-makers. In this case, several champions helped organize the necessary
coalition by crossing political boundaries at the state level to obtain high-level support for the Urban Partnership process. Because MnDOT and the Met Council decision-makers were not fully on board, champions from the university and the Citizens League met with these people to stress the opportunity represented by the Urban Partnership program. They did the same with key legislators. The legislators, in turn, helped MnDOT and Met Council change their minds by threatening to submit an Urban Partnership proposal if MnDOT and Met Council did not. Later the university and Citizens League champions controversially transgressed normal decision-making paths by putting pressure on the governor to support the emerging contours of the Minnesota application. Ultimately, the governor and his lieutenant-governor (who also was transportation commissioner) became sponsors once they were assured that congestion pricing would only be applied to existing high-occupancy-vehicle (HOV) lanes and shoulders. The successful Minnesota grant application thus was backed by a coalition of congestion-fighting advocates from the academic and nonprofit sectors, along with state, regional and local officials and transportation planners. The Minnesota coalition remained largely intact after federal officials approved its UPA project, though some initially supportive legislators began to grumble that they were not kept fully informed as the Steering Committee proceeded with planning the multiple projects that composed the agreement.

Extensive coalition-building also occurred at the federal level, where pricing advocates like Duvall and DeCorla-Souza convinced top administrators to put their clout behind the approach. US Transportation Secretary Peters persuaded White House staff that the Urban Partnership program was a good idea. Horner ensured that needed administrative decisions were aligned within various USDOT areas and that the program was protected from attack in formal courts. The federal sponsors and champions recognized that the next president could go back to a siloed approach, so they reached out to governors in order to build political support at the state level that would outlast the Bush administration. They reported that some states not included in UPA adopted the “4 T” approach; they believe that it may be “reaching critical mass in the states”. They are trying to get the integrated multimodal approach included in next federal surface transportation reauthorization bill.

During the first year after federal officials approved Minnesota’s UPA project, the state legislature became the most important arena. because the legislature had to approve the $55.2 million in matching funds as well as authority to impose dynamic pricing on project roadways. Here a key supporter was the chair of the Minnesota Senate transportation committee, who emphasized the safety benefits of reducing congestion and helped convince skeptical legislators that the program was worthwhile even if it did not directly improve transportation in their districts.
Lessons

Analysis of integrative visionary leadership in the case of Minnesota’s Urban Partnership Agreement produces several lessons for those who aspire to practice integrative leadership.

1. Enough shared agreement about a problem permits diverse stakeholders to collaborate on remedying it, but diverse frames are still likely to need reconciling.

2. Academic champions are important. They have access to expertise outside government agencies and can be somewhat neutral conveners and analysts who have more freedom to espouse good, evidence-based ideas.

3. A well-defined competition is an effective way to elicit good ideas that accomplish the organizers’ goals.

4. A competitive process that promotes flexibility and local adaptation within an overall strategic framework makes collaboration or partnership more attractive to the local partners.

5. Advanced technology can be an important solution component but also a magnet for participation.

6. Substantial funding provides a strong incentive and may provide legitimacy.

7. The prospect of having substantial impact may help partners sign on despite substantial risk.

8. Solution ideas should be well developed so they are ready for prime time when a window of opportunity opens.

9. Integrative leaders may be wise to link a vision for change to what stakeholders already want or intend to do. They should consider integrating collaborative structures and major system innovation with regular routines and decision-making channels, so that the changes are not interpreted as renegade endeavors. They are likely to need to blend collaboration and hierarchy.

10. Cross-boundary forums are crucial. Leaders can take advantage of existing ones to push ideas and create new ones to develop shared understanding of a problem and potential solutions as well as commitment to agreed-upon actions.

11. The production of boundary objects and agreement on the structure of needed cross-boundary groups and organizations seem to be important outcomes of cross-boundary forums.

12. A grassroots approach has advantages for developing solutions to complex public problems, but at some point leaders will have to focus on developing needed shared understandings and commitments at the grassroots, too.
Conclusions

In keeping with our prior research, we identified a number of sponsors and champions who provided essential visionary leadership in crafting a so-far-successful collaboration to remedy a complex public problem. Their partially shared agreement on the nature of the problem and its causes helped bridge differences among stakeholders from different levels of government and non-governmental organizations. They did apply a variety of competing frames to potential problem solutions. The integrative frame pushed by the federal advocates ultimately dominated because it was backed up by substantial funding and a promise of substantial impact, and because it offered ways for regional and local stakeholders to see how their pre-existing projects might fit within it. The technology requirement made the Urban Partnership program exciting to potential partners. Still the Minnesota Urban Partnership application might have foundered if pricing advocates had not succeeded in winning over the governor with a combination of using high-occupancy and shoulder lanes to meet the tolling requirement and if federal officials had not been flexible enough to allow this despite its being an “impure” form of congestion-pricing.

This case underscores important ways that visionary leaders can champion new and improved ideas for dealing with a public problem. Tying the ideas to effectiveness and efficiency arguments appealed across stakeholder divisions. The competitive RFP process and demonstration projects were especially effective in ensuring that the best ideas surfaced and accomplished what the initiators hoped they would.

The analysis of this case reveals the usefulness of understanding the role of forums in cross-boundary integration. We expect that viewing them as boundary experiences that produce boundary objects and groups and organizations may be a helpful perspective for integrative leaders. Our study of the Minnesota UPA collaboration highlights the importance of particular kinds of objects central to the process. These material artifacts have functioned as “boundary objects” (Carlile 2002, 2004; Kellogg, Orlikowski and Yates 2006). Of particular importance in the UPA case was the creation and use of boundary objects in the form of various proposals, agreements, maps and timelines by key stakeholders. These objects and the process of creating them were crucial to developing shared understandings, and the coalition needed to move forward. The role of boundary objects thus clearly merits further investigation.

Technology was a source of innovation via its enabling of congestion-pricing and telecommuting. Intelligent systems linked elements of the vision together. Technology was an exciter that appealed to people across governmental levels and across sectors. Technology was a facilitator in allowing disparate groups to use a common medium to assemble and revise boundary objects. We also conclude that further study of the role of technology in facilitating or hampering leadership across boundaries is merited.
References


