Workshop #2 Summary Participant Reactions to the American Community Survey (ACS)

Facilitators:

John Adams, Elaine Murakami,

Bob Sicko, Ed Christopher &

Kostas Goulias

Summarizer: Chuck Purvis

Use & Interpretation of ACS

- Population Estimates used for weighting ACS data are a major concern. No consensus but common concern in several workshops. How are they applied and how do they affect smaller geographic units? If error in pop estimates, then what errors? "End of Decade" effect may/will yield a discontinuity jump….
- Include a new MPO geographic summary level.
- TAZes to be a standard tabulation geography (5-year accumulation) (common thread).

Use & Interpretation of ACS II

- Trend Data: break in decennial versus ACS trends. Strong desire for historical comparisons. Problem with folks comparing decennial to ACS.
- Also a problem with “ranking tables” …
- Diverse audience for use of ACS. MPOs are not interested in just transportation data, and Census Bureau needs to anticipate their needs. E.g., transit interest in: elderly,disabled, minority, low inc, limited English proficiency, paratransit
- Research: MPOs need to be very clear and list their needs.

Use & Interpretation of ACS III

- Idea: use of aggregate time-series models, for fare elasticity analyses?
- ACS should be great for expanding/weighting household travel survey.
- Bicycle and walk commute data needed, and needed separated.
- Title VI analyses could be challenging because of inexplicable year-to-year changes.s

ACS Education

- ACS should be educating local government officials in addition to congress. What do the confidence intervals mean to small jurisdictions?
- Census Bureau needs to explain estimates and margin of errors; be aware of non-sampling errors; raise awareness and responsibility of the analyst when using ACS data.
- Transit users: comfortable with the ACS Base Table

Use of Group Quarter Data

- Changing nature of independent living in non-institutional group quarters. Definitions!
- Military GQ population is important for their commute characteristics.
- Dormitory populations are both students as well as commuters!
- Concern about “mobile” persons in institutional as well as non-institutional GQ.
- Strong concerns/doubts about Bureau’s ability to collect GQ data (budget, testing).
- Strong need to tabulate household workers and GQ workers

Confidentiality & Disclosure I

- **What is the Disclosure Risk????** Is it means of transportation or income or industry or race/ethnicity that's giving the Bureau a problem?
- The Census Bureau needs to disclose the disclosure rules, before we address issues related to geography and tables.
- **Major disappointment** with CTPP, Part 3, Table 3-3 through 3-7.
- Suppression was extensive, such that the FLOW DATA (not necessarily Part 1 & 2) was useless.

Confidentiality & Disclosure II

- Make sure the Numbers Add Up!
- Make the Row & Columns Add Up!
- Investigate Aussie practice of adding noise (with mean = 0) so rows/columns are OK!
- Where is the optimal point for minimizing suppressed information, at earliest time period?
- Need to explain tradeoffs to traffic engineers re: disclosure problems for small areas. Smaller is better?
- Research is needed on the age of data (one year versus 5-year) and disclosure risk?

Confidentiality & Disclosure III

- Research Data Centers (RDCs) are a problem for easy access to original microdata. This needs to be improved.
- Interested in conducting research on synthetic data, inside the RDC environment.
- Need to de-couple the discussion of ACS flow tables from any discussions related to Residence-end or work-end tabulations.

"Super-TAZ" & GeoAreas

- Geographic summary level that would allow sufficient samples for multi-way tabulations, if suppression rules must be used in flow tabs, e.g., supertaz-to-supertaz commuters by mode by income (or by ???)
- Different Geographies for Origin Zone and Destination Zone (Australia model) is a possible interest and should be explored in the research area.

TAZ Definition Issues

- Can we define TAZes in 2008 for use in the 2005/2009 ACS databases? Or do we have to wait for after the 2010 Census?

Different Flow Tabulation Concepts

- TAZ-to-TAZ: simple tables
- Supertaz-to-Supertaz: multi-way tables
- Five-year accumulations “On Demand” rather than a national program. Users would request their five-year data when they wanted it.

Sample Size

- Five-year aggregation for very small areas is OK. There were negative opinions about the 7+ year aggregation, e.g., too much mixing of very old with very recent data.

Cost-Reimbursable

- Probably a dead issue.
- Why would we pay to get more suppressed data?
- MPOs and Transit Agencies are more likely to spend their moneys on household travel surveys and transit on-board surveys,

Research Needs

- Research Group: Institutionalizing the “quilting” o of data (patchwork / data stitching) of data at the nationwide level, including ACS, CPS, LED, TIGER, EIEIO.
- Research: TRB Should take the lead on:
  - utility of the data for decision-making
  - Ideal data for specific applications (ideal time, geography)
  - Implications of data suppression techniques
  - When to use each ACS application product?
  - How to explain usefulness of residential mobility in analyses

Thank You!!!!

- Facilitators & Reporters
  - Metro I: John Adams & Shimon Israel
  - Metro II: Elaine Murakami & Rachel Gossen
  - Transit: Bob Sicko & Caitlin Cottrill
  - State: Ed Christopher & Scott Walker
  - Research: Kostas Goulias & Andrew Von Ah
- TRB Staff
  - Tom Palmerlee & Brian Canepa