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AN ANALYSIS OF TENANT DISPLACEMENTS IN VIRGINIA

by

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(The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the sponsoring agencies.)

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ABSTRACT

The research reported concentrates on tenants relocated by highway construction in Virginia between July 1, 1981 to June 30, 1985. It assesses whether relocation housing payments are being used for the purpose intended by the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act; it investigates the adjustment patterns of tenants who have been relocated by the Virginia Department of Transportation; and it provides information that may prove useful in assessing the appropriateness of certain portions of the 1970 Uniform Act as it applies to tenants.

Suggestions for improving the Uniform Act are offered in those areas related to the relocation housing payment ceiling, the number of months used to calculate the maximum rental supplement, aid for utilities increases, and housing of last resort.

OVERVIEW AND SUGGESTIONS FOR POLICY CHANGE

A previous study by the authors concluded that tenants were being adequately compensated and were able to maintain decent, safe, and sanitary housing for a substantial period after relocation. Based on information received by the VDOT and FHWA that implied that tenants were suffering economically and socially under the present relocation legislation, the authors were requested to update their earlier study and obtain current data. The results of this study, although case specific, provide evidence that with few exceptions, tenant displacees fare no worse now than they did when that earlier study was conducted (1978). The study described herein does point out, however, that certain aspects of the relocation assistance program as it pertains to tenants warrant attention.

In general, the study revealed that tenants are no more likely to move a short time after relocation than the general population; they are generally satisfied with payments; and the majority feel their living conditions have improved as a result of displacement. However, since 38% of the respondents cited increased utilities as a hardship occasioned by relocation, revisions in the Uniform Act regarding compensation should address this issue. Moreover, since over 40% of the tenant displacees in Virginia qualify for last-resort housing and the average replacement housing payment (RHP) was \$5,500, some attention should be given to the RHP limits.

Although the authors do not feel that massive changes in the Uniform Act are needed, the following recommendations are offered for consideration.

1. The evidence from this study suggests that the current RHP limit may be inappropriate, and should be increased to \$5,500. While data from this study supports an RHP of \$5,500, it is more appropriate to use the national average for RHP payments. It is further recommended that the last-resort clause remain a part of the Uniform Act.
2. Although the appropriate number of months over which the RHP should be calculated remains a judgment call, it is recommended that data from this study be used as the benchmark for such calculation. In this particular case, the average difference between pre and post relocation rents was \$130. Establishing an RHP limit of \$5,500 (Recommendation 2) implies the tenants should receive supplements for 43 months.
3. It is recommended that any future revisions to the Uniform Act should address utility costs as a part of other compensation revisions.

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BACKGROUND

The Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (Uniform Act) was fully implemented by the Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation on April 10, 1972. In 1975 the Virginia Highway and Transportation Research Council was asked to assess the social and economic impact that the relocation process had on owners and tenants displaced due to highway construction. In this initial study,* the authors sought to determine the degree to which relocation as administered by the Department's Right-of-Way Division was achieving the goals set forth in the Uniform Act. The need for a more detailed study of tenant displacees was determined after the initial study revealed that tenants faced different incentives than owners in terms of the manner in which relocation payments were made. This detailed study, entitled "Tenant Mobility and Adjustment Under the 1970 Uniform Relocation Act," was completed in 1978 and concluded that tenants generally were compensated adequately and continued to occupy a decent, safe, and sanitary (DSS) replacement dwelling for up to four years after relocation. In addition, it concluded that the majority of the tenant displacees used replacement housing payments to cover rent.

The 1978 study investigated tenant displacements occurring 12 to 14 years ago. The study reported herein serves to some extent as an update of that study. It seeks to assess whether relocation payments are being used for the purpose intended by the Uniform Act, to investigate the adjustment patterns of tenants who have been relocated by the

* "Relocation Due to Highway Takings: A Diachronic Analysis of Social and Economic Effects," by Gary R. Allen and Mike A. Perfater, Virginia Highway Transportation Research Council, VHTRC 76-R14, Charlottesville, Virginia, September 1976.

Department, and to provide information that may be of help in assessing the appropriateness of certain portions of the Uniform Act as it applies to tenant displacees.

The major objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To determine the length of stay in the original replacement dwelling.
2. To determine whether or not tenant displacees remain in DSS housing after the rent supplement payment has been spent.
3. To examine the tendency of tenant displacees to move from their replacement dwelling during and after the four-year period after relocation.
4. To determine if those who become owners as a result of the relocation process remain owners after an extended period of time.
5. To examine the efficacy of lump-sum disbursement (as opposed to periodic installments) and the monitoring of assistance payments.
6. To assess the adequacy of the \$4,000 rent-supplement limit and the 48-month supplement period.
7. To suggest appropriate changes in time and monetary limitations as currently established by statute.

As in the previously cited study, this report deals mostly with specific responses received from tenants to questions regarding incentives they faced on receiving the relocation payment in a lump sum. The study is limited to tenant relocations that occurred between July 1, 1981 and June 30, 1985. The authors chose this period to enable them to include in the sample respondents who had been relocated only for a short time as well as those who had been relocated more than four years. The study employed a case study approach, the data being gathered through an examination of Department records, personal interviews, and postal surveys of displacees.

METHODOLOGY

Between July 1, 1981, and June 30, 1985, 212 tenant households were displaced by the Virginia Department of Transportation. This group was selected for the interview poll. Because of deaths, data errors, and non-traceable relocatee addresses or unpublished telephone numbers, 55 households were eliminated immediately from the survey. Of the 157 remaining in the sample, telephone numbers could be ascertained for only

16. These 16 were interviewed for ten minutes by telephone to gather both factual and attitudinal information about their experiences with the relocation process (Appendix A).

The 141 households that could not be contacted by telephone were mailed a questionnaire containing the same questions as the telephone interview. One follow-up letter was sent to persons not responding within two weeks. Fifty-two questionnaires were received that, coupled with the 16 completed interviews, yielded a combined response of 43% (68) of the 157 in the sample.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE POPULATION

The Respondents

The greatest number of respondents were displaced in FY 1982 and 98% of the respondents were paying less than \$300 rent (See Table 1). In addition, 28% of the respondents were living in non-DSS housing prior to being displaced. The prerelocation rent was \$103, whereas postrelocation rents averaged \$167.85. Sixteen percent of the respondents became owners as a result of relocation, and all but one of these (roughly 15% of the respondents) received relocation settlement in the form of a down-payment supplement. Approximately 85% chose a replacement housing payment. Forty-eight percent of the respondents qualified for last-resort housing payments.

The Nonrespondents

All nonrespondents paid less than \$300 rent prior to relocation, the average being \$103 rent per month; afterwards, their rent increased to \$184.83. This indicates that although the nonrespondent group tended to pay slightly higher rents after relocation than the respondent group, each occupied housing of similar quality. There were slightly fewer owners in the nonrespondent group. About 48% of the respondents lived in non-DSS housing prior to being displaced, whereas 37% qualified for last-resort-housing payments. The geographic distributions of the groups were comparable, although the majority of displacees in both the respondent and nonrespondent group were concentrated in the Suffolk District.

In summary, the respondents appeared to pay slightly lower rents and include a greater number of homeowners. This difference as well as others discussed in the foregoing, however, is not great enough to show a significant distinction between respondent and nonrespondent groups. Therefore, the findings from the respondent sample can be considered valid and representative of the original sample population of 157 cases.

TABLE 1
 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE POPULATION
 (N = 157)

Category	<u>Percentage of Respondents</u> (N = 68)	<u>Percentage of Nonrespondents</u> (N = 89)
Prerelocation Monthly Rent		
0-100	59.3	65.5
101-200	27.4	25.9
201-300	10.8	8.6
301-400	1.3	-0-
601-500	1.2	-0-
over 500	-0-	-0-
Postrelocation Monthly Rent		
0-100	17.2	23.6
101-200	30.6	38.2
201-300	19.7	23.6
301-400	10.8	12.7
401-500	13.8	1.9
over 500	7.9	-0-
Prerelocation Housing Quality		
DSS	62.4	51.6
Non-DSS	37.6	48.4
Postrelocation Ownership Status		
Tenant	82.2	93.3
Owner	17.8	6.7
Type of Payment Received		
Repl. Housing Payment	84.1	93.3
Down payment	14.6	6.7
None	1.3	-0-
Last Resort Qualifier	45.2	36.7

ANALYSIS

Questionnaire Results

Mobility

The authors depended on an attitudinal survey to provide information concerning the relocation experience of this group of tenants. The questionnaire (administered both by telephone and through the mail) was used to determine the pattern and causes of movement of tenants, the adequacy of payments, changes in living costs, and general overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the relocation experience. The reader should recall that a goal of the study was to determine whether tenant displacees are suffering any social or economic injury under the present relocation assistance legislation, regulations, or policies and procedures. The survey contained, therefore, a series of questions aimed at making that determination.

Regarding mobility, it is important that 64 of the 68 respondents or (94%) lived in the original replacement dwelling at the time of the survey. It should also be mentioned that 19 of the 68 respondents now classify themselves as homeowners. Table 2 presents details of the length of occupancy in the replacement dwelling. Better than half of the respondents continued to live in the replacement dwelling for 2 years or more, and 26.5% continue to reside in the replacement more than 4 years after being relocated there. This finding suggests that after being relocated, tenants are no more mobile than the general population

TABLE 2

Length of Occupancy in Replacement Dwelling
(N = 68)

<u>Category</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Less than 6 mo.	7.4
6 mo. - 1 yr.	8.8
1-2 yr.	17.6
2-4 yr.	38.2
More than 4 yr.	26.5
No response	<u>1.5</u>
TOTAL	100.0

since it has been estimated that half of the general population of Virginia moves about every 5 years. Even more telling is the fact that four of the five tenant displacees who were not currently living in their replacement dwelling did remain in it for more than 2 years. Finally, when asked if they were generally satisfied with the dwelling into which they were relocated, 72% answered in the affirmative. Moreover, only about 10% of the respondents felt their living conditions were worse since being displaced.

These responses to the questionnaire are consistent with the 1978 study which found that relocation caused by highway construction is neither a significant influence on the length of time a tenant displacee remains in replacement housing nor on a decision to move from that housing.

Payment Adequacy - The Rent Supplement

The results of the questionnaire suggest that the rental cost of replacement dwellings is not a significant factor in tenant mobility patterns. Nevertheless, the authors examined monthly rent differences to substantiate these results. Table 3 presents the distribution of current rental payments for the respondents. The current average monthly rent for tenants in the sample is \$222, \$54 more per month than they were paying after being relocated and almost twice what they were paying prior to their relocation (Table 4). What's important to remember here is that the original increase in rent was offset by a RHP. However, the questionnaire responses suggest that even though rents continued to rise over and above the amount that the RHP was intended to cover, these increases in housing costs did not result in tenants moving to lower-priced dwellings.

Only 25% of the respondents indicated that they used the money they received from the Department to cover rent increases. Sixteen percent would not tell us how they spent the money, and 19% took advantage of the down-payment supplement option to become homeowners. It should be remembered, however, that six additional respondents became homeowners and did not choose to use the down-payment supplement.

Interestingly enough, 25% also indicated that the money received was not sufficient to cover rent over a four-year period. These seventeen respondents, the authors conclude, were generally dissatisfied with the amount of money they received from the Department. Further questioning revealed that although most respondents feel that it costs them more to live in their new home than the one they lived in prior to their relocation, the additional expense most often cited by those dissatisfied with payments is utilities. In fact, 33.8% (23) of the respondent group indicated that a utility cost increase was the item that increased their cost of living the most. This finding suggests that a payment for utility increases over and above what would have been expected in the prerelocation dwelling should be considered for inclusion in the relocation benefits package.

TABLE 3

Current Monthly Rent
(N = 57)^a

<u>Rent Category (Dollars)</u>	<u>Absolute Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents</u>
0-50	3	5.3
51-100	5	8.8
101-200	15	26.3
201-300	12	21.1
301-400	8	14.0
401-500	3	5.3
over 500	1	1.8

^a Twenty-one respondents are currently owners or do not pay rent.

TABLE 4

Increase in Monthly Rent Since Relocation
(N = 42)

<u>Increase (Dollars)</u>	<u>Absolute Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents</u>
0-50	10	23.8
51-100	16	38.1
101-200	9	21.4
201-300	5	11.9
301-400	2	4.8

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A final question asked respondents to compare their overall living condition in the prerelocation and postrelocation housing. Seventy-two percent felt that their living conditions were better after the Department moved them. Only five respondents indicated their living conditions had deteriorated as result of the relocation experience.

Results of Cross Tabulations

Cross tabulations were designed to test for statistical evidence of a relationship between mobility and payment type (lump sum or annual disbursements). While the tests proved, in general, that no such relationship exists, specific supportive evidence of this conclusion is the content of the discussion which follows.

The cross tabulation results were consistent with the evidence presented earlier that rental increases after relocation do not precipitate moving from the replacement dwelling. The cross tabulations between the distribution of respondents presently at the replacement both by the absolute rent level and by the rent increase since relocation were statistically insignificant. Although high rent or large increases in rent were hypothesized to have been associated with a reluctance to remain in the replacement, no such pattern emerged. Moves occurred with no significantly different probability regardless of the level of rent or increase in rent. Furthermore, only 5 of the 68 respondents (7.3%) were found to have moved since being relocated. Of this group, 4 remained in the original replacement dwelling at least 2 years and 1 remained 4 years.

The second item in support of the authors' conclusion that the disbursement procedure is unrelated to tenant mobility is that the manner in which tenants are paid has no significant impact on their behavior. In particular, how tenant displacees received their RHP had no effect on how they used the money; that is, although the authors hypothesized that those who received their RHP in a lump sum would be less likely to use the money for their rental payment than those receiving the RHP in four installments, cross tabulations required that the hypothesis be rejected. Of the 56 respondents who rent, 30% used at least a portion of the RHP for the increased rent resulting from relocation; however, among this group, the proportion who received the annual payment and used the RHP for rent was not significantly different from the proportion that would have been expected to do so on the basis of chance. Not only does the payment procedure not affect the use of the payment, it does not appear to influence the length of time a tenant remains in the replacement dwelling. Although one might reasonably argue that receiving the RHP in a lump sum, which for the respondents averaged \$6,336, would be more of an incentive to move from the replacement housing than annual payments, statistical evidence doesn't support that argument for Virginia tenant displacees. In fact, among the group

who did not move at all, 65% received the RHP in a lump sum and 35% received the RHP in annual installments. Although the authors expected that those receiving lump-sum payments would have moved quicker, cross tabulations showed no significant pattern between length of time in the replacement dwelling and the method of payment. Finally, the authors examined the extent to which receipt of the lump-sum payment influences the decision of tenants to purchase a home. Only 2.3% (2) of the respondents purchased homes after relocation into tenant housing. The payment procedure was insignificantly influential in this choice.

The third item of interest regarding the statistical cross tabulations is that the use to which the RHP is put seemingly is unrelated to the length of residence in the original replacement. Cross tabulations between the use of the RHP and length of stay in the replacement dwelling did not prove statistically significant. Although 19.1% of the respondents used the RHP to purchase consumer durables such as a trailer or land and 25% used the money for necessities other than rent, these individuals remained in the replacement housing for periods not significantly shorter than those individuals who used the RHP for rent exclusively.

As the authors indicated in the discussion of the questionnaire results, no dominant reason appeared to explain the moves of tenant displacees from replacement housing. It is fairly clear, however, that tenant relocatees tend in the vast majority of cases to remain in the replacement dwelling for relatively long periods. The group of five tenant displacees who moved after their initial relocation appeared to be influenced in that decision by very specific reasons, none of which were related to identifiable aspects of the disbursement mechanism or socioeconomic status.

Payment Adequacy and Housing of Last Resort

Although the evidence presented in previous sections overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that tenant relocatees remain in DSS housing for extended periods after relocation and their housing is generally upgraded by relocation, a second policy issue of frequent interest to practitioners is the adequacy of payment. This issue has two aspects: (1) Is the \$4,000 limit on RHPs sufficient to place a significant proportion of relocatees in DSS housing and (2) Is basing the maximum total RHP on 48 months an appropriate public policy?

To a certain degree, the issue of payment adequacy is semantic. The last-resort housing clause of the Uniform Act enables VDOT to place relocatees in DSS housing in those instances in which the difference between the prerelocation rent and postrelocation DSS comparable rent exceeds the legal maximum of \$4,000. The need for the clause is clear:

it imposes a spending constraint while it allows administrative latitude in dealing with special cases. From a policy perspective, the spending constraint should be balanced against the incidence of exceptions. In the case at hand, of the 157 cases in the Virginia sample, 72 (45.6%) were relocated under the housing-of-last-resort clause. Of the 68 respondents to the questionnaire, 32 (48%) fell in the housing-of-last-resort category. As one might not have expected the occurrence of last resort housing is almost equally divided among DSS and non-DSS prereslocation categories. That such a large percentage of displacees were relocated under the last-resort clause is prima facie evidence that the current limit is inappropriate.

Having established the inadequacy of the \$4,000 limit, the task remains to establish options that may be more consistent with the current and near term environment. The authors base these options solely on the results of the survey responses from Virginia displacees, recognizing that some adjustments may be reasonable when considering a national perspective.

The average RHP to the 157 households in the total sample (including housing-of-last-resort cases) was \$5,508. For the respondents to the questionnaire, the average was slightly over \$6,300. These figures clearly offer some benchmarks for consideration. However, recognizing that a strong case exists for keeping a last-resort clause in the Uniform Act, a limit close to \$5,500 may be appropriate.

The authors do not hesitate to point out that the number of months over which the RHP will be calculated is totally arbitrary. The government might wish to compensate an individual for a rent differential for the number of months a displacee would have remained in the original dwelling had they not been forced to vacate by the acquiring agency. Although theoretically appealing, deriving such a figure is no easier than obtaining political acceptance for such a policy. Nevertheless, the authors propose one avenue as a supportable alternative among many. This is to base the number of months over which the RHP will be calculated on the period of time it would take to absorb the RHP by the respondents in this study without exceeding the threshold of the last-resort clause. For example, prereslocation and postrelocation rents differed by about \$130 per month. If the maximum RHP is set at \$5,500, a rent differential could be calculated on the basis of about 43 months without triggering the housing-of-last-resort clause. This proposal is in a sense arbitrary; it does, however, have a partial factual basis, and it doesn't generate payments leading to housing of last resort in a significant number of cases.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE
An Analysis of Tenant Relocations in Virginia

Please note that all answers are strictly confidential and will be used only as information to help us improve the relocation process.

- 1. Do you rent your present dwelling or own it? (circle one) (1) rent (2) own (3) neither
- 2. What is your current address? _____

- 3. How long have you lived at this address? (circle one)
(1) less than 6 months (3) between 1 and 2 years (5) more than 4 years
(2) 6 months to 1 year (4) 2 to 4 years
- 4. Is this the same place in which the highway department helped you settle?
(circle one) (1) yes (2) no

IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO QUESTION 4, DO NOT ANSWER NUMBERS 5 AND 6

- 5. How long did you stay in that first place? _____ months _____ years
- 6. What caused you to move? _____

- 7. Overall, were (are) you generally satisfied with the dwelling to which you were relocated?
(circle one) (1) yes (2) no

IF YOU OWN YOUR HOME, SKIP QUESTIONS 8, 9, AND 10

- 8. How much rent do you pay monthly? \$ _____
- 9. How does that rent compare with what you paid before the highway department moved you?
(circle one) (1) it is more now (2) it is less now (3) it is the same
- 10. If what you pay now is not the same as when the highway department moved you, by how much per month is it different? \$ _____

IF YOU RENT YOUR HOME, SKIP QUESTIONS 11 AND 12

- 11. Did being relocated have anything to do with your buying a home?
(circle one) (1) yes (2) no (if no, proceed to question 13)
- 12. In what way? _____

- 13. Did you use money you received from the highway department to pay for an increase in rent?
(circle one) (1) yes (2) no (3) n/a
- 14. Was the money sufficient to cover all increases in rent over the four-year period?
(circle one) (1) yes (2) no (3) n/a
- 15. If not, how did it fall short? _____

- 16. Were there other ways in which the money you received was helpful? _____

- 17. Overall, does, or did it cost you more, less, or the same to live in your new home as compared to the one you lived in prior to the highway department move?
(circle one) (1) more (2) less (3) same
- 18. What costs you more as a result of your relocation? (circle all that apply)
(1) utilities (2) transportation to and from work (3) neighborhood fees (4) taxes
(5) not sure (6) nothing (7) other _____
- 9. What costs less? (circle all that apply)
(1) utilities (2) transportation to and from work (3) neighborhood fees (4) taxes
(5) not sure (6) nothing (7) other _____

20. Are your overall living conditions better, worse, or the same as they were before the Highway Department moved you? (circle one) (1) better (2) worse (3) same
21. What is your occupation? _____
22. What is your age? (circle one) (1) under 21 (3) 31-40 (5) 51-60 (7) over 70
(2) 21-30 (4) 41-50 (6) 61-70
23. What is your sex? (circle one) M F
24. Counting yourself, how many people live in your dwelling? (circle one)
1 2 3 4 5 6 or more
25. What is your marital status?
(circle one) (1) married (2) single (3) divorced (4) separated (5) widowed
26. What was your total family income in 1985? (circle one)
(1) \$0 - \$5,000 (3) \$10,001 - \$15,000 (5) \$20,001 - \$30,000
(2) \$5,001 - \$10,000 (4) \$15,001 - \$20,000 (6) over \$30,000
27. Please enter any additional comments you would like to make. _____

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