New England University Transportation Center

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Final Report

Project Title:

Teaching Case Studies on the Regulation of Motor Vehicle Air Pollution in China

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Problem Addressed:

With motorization proceeding at an extraordinarily rapid rate in China, the domestic automobile industry will continue to be a key driver of economic development. At the same time, motor vehicle pollution is a critical component of China's severe air quality problem and has the potential to become an even greater issue in the years to come.

On this project, we are developing Harvard Kennedy School teaching case studies on the policy and institutional dimensions of recent efforts to control motor vehicle air pollution in China, focusing on the efforts to improve Beijing air quality in the 2008 Olympic Games. The cases are intended to inform students about pollution reduction efforts in the context of the rapidly changing Chinese urban transportation system and to prompt them to think about how they would approach various policy and implementation options for reducing motor vehicle air pollution.

Research Approach and Methodology:

An important element of the Harvard Kennedy School's (HKS) teaching curriculum is its extensive case study archive, which provides graduate students and professionals with in-depth descriptions of a wide range of public policy issues. This project supported the development of HKS teaching cases that explore key planning and regulatory issues concerning China's motor vehicle pollution problem. More specifically, the cases are designed to focus on efforts to improve air quality in Beijing in preparation for the 2008 Olympic Games. These efforts constituted a significant attempt on the part of the municipal and national governments to address the city's pollution problems and also served as a test case for several regulatory strategies to be implemented elsewhere in the country.

The project's principal investigator and research staff employed traditional HKS case-writing methods to research and develop the cases. As such, they gathered general information from documentary materials and news accounts and conducted in-depth interviews with key participants, namely senior-level Chinese government officials involved in transportation planning and environmental regulatory policy. They then analyzed the assembled data to determine major teaching points and case themes. The case-writing team will conduct additional research this spring and case drafts will be completed this summer.

Research Findings/Conclusions/Recommendations:

The cases are currently in development and will be completed in summer 2009. Upon completion, they will be made available through the HKS case archive and used in teaching programs by the principal investigator and other Harvard and partner-university instructors.