

# Regional Governance of Metropolitan Form: The Missing Link in Relating Land Use and Transportation

DOUGLAS R. PORTER  
Urban Land Institute, Washington, D.C.

**M**etropolitan areas in the United States are evolving within a framework of governance that is calculated to support and reinforce the most desired life-styles of Americans. Most residents (and voters) in the United States place a high value on living in a semirural environment and driving their cars to work, shopping, recreation, and every other aspect of their daily lives. The resulting urban sprawl and automobile dependency are endemic in the metropolitan regions of the United States. Unfortunately, this mode of living and traveling is expensive in terms of infrastructure requirements, environmental damage, and equitable service to all sectors of the population. Those costs appear to be increasingly unbearable both economically and politically.

The governance systems established to guide development of metropolitan areas, however, are intended to further those development objectives, or at least to avoid interference with them. States have given local governments powers to control the character of development and have structured tax policies that buttress the tendencies of local governments to pursue fiscal and exclusionary land use policies. In the transportation arena, states essentially have retained control over major highways, the backbone of metropolitan transportation systems, leaving feeder roads and transit systems mostly to local control.

These divisions of labor among state and local governments have failed to produce rational or systematic strategies for development of metropolitan areas, in which most Americans reside and work. To bridge that governance gap, the federal government in particular has encouraged the formation of regional or metropolitan agencies to provide information on growth trends, prepare long-range plans to meet future needs, and support implementation efforts.

After nearly three decades of experience, almost none of these agencies has proved successful in setting and meeting regionwide objectives for either land use or transportation. Most regional agencies are almost powerless to steer any other course than the status quo, and few are capable of determining or implementing metropolitan development strategies. With no one in charge, public guidance of metropolitan development is fragmentary, discontinuous, and ultimately ineffective.

Three working models of regional planning and implementation enlighten this bleak state of affairs. Perhaps the most successful of these models relates not to metropolitan development but to preservation of important natural resources, frequently those threatened by unguided metropolitan growth. Another model is the rare regional agency that possesses significant powers to implement urban growth strategies at the regional scale. Finally, the model offered by Florida's regional planning agencies suggests a potential if not fully realized solution. To adapt these models to effective metropolitan governance of land use and transportation, however, will require a broader vision of the future metropolis, an informed constituency that understands the shortsightedness of parochial decision making, and federal and state initiatives to define and empower regional decision making.

The discussion that follows will attempt to sort out how land use and transportation decisions are made, and how those processes and procedures may ultimately affect the form and character of metropolitan development. The focus is on highway transportation and transit, the systems most used by metropolitan residents. By tracking the decision paths that typically lead to land use and transportation decisions, the key points of interaction can be defined and their influence on metropolitan growth patterns can be discerned.

## **DOMINANCE OF THE MARKETPLACE**

At the outset, it is perhaps useful to remind readers that public policies and public institutions tend to play supporting rather than principal roles in determining metropolitan growth patterns. Metropolitan

development in the United States is driven by market forces that are only marginally influenced by public policies and regulations. This is so obvious a statement that public officials often forget that their efforts to plan and manage development more often guide than direct development choices. At the simplest level, most development occurs because the market demands it. The market indicates land use and transportation preferences, and public policy decisions usually are keyed to market choices—either stimulating, supporting, or dampening them. The regime of public decision making may modify the actions of the marketplace but only to a degree, and perhaps a fairly small degree.

Transportation systems, of course, offer public officials a powerful tool for influencing urban form and quality, especially in the urbanizing fringes of metropolitan areas where our future cities are being created. Not surprisingly, perhaps, public officials have voted to support the market with massive highway building programs, tempered to a degree by the transit system investments of the past decade or two.

And there is the nub of the problem. Downs has spoken and written extensively about the gap between the daily mode of living desired by most Americans and the mode that most city planners and traffic engineers believe is most appropriate (1). Americans generally want a house on a large lot and three cars in every garage, or rather on the highways (typified by the title of an article by Dubbink: *I'll Have Mine Medium Rural, Please*) (2). Yet that dream translates into low-density sprawl and dependence on roads and highways, a pattern of spreading metropolitan development that is expensive in terms of public and private infrastructure costs, quality of life, and environmental damage. A reality gap exists in this vision of life in America. Some people can afford to bridge the gap by spending more to support their expensive habits. But many people cannot, and many people are weary of long commutes and worried about the disappearing countryside. The maturing environmental movement is forcing a re-examination of the modus operandi of urban development. The high costs of infrastructure improvements also are encouraging a reevaluation of current land use. Perhaps the time has come for rethinking public decision making at the metropolitan level of governance.

## **PUBLIC GUIDANCE OF LAND USE**

Zoning and subdivision controls adopted and administered by local governments compose the basic public decision arena for determining land use. Leading to this decision point are several levels of public

determinations about urban development. They begin with official projections of population and employment that define land use demands for housing, retail, industrial, and other development. In most metropolitan areas these projections for local jurisdictions are subsets of regional projections, probably modified to some degree by local governments to reflect their particular version of reality. Projected demands and needs are then shaped by a set of local public policies to form a comprehensive plan or set of functional plans intended to portray the shape and content of future development. These ideas are extended into regulatory and programmatic actions that specify in greater detail what can or should be built and where. Ultimately, public entities act to approve individual developments, either by administrative action or by discretionary determinations after hearings and negotiations that often modify the private proposals and that may not reflect adopted policies.

Multiply this line of decisions by the number of separate jurisdictions in a given metropolitan area and it equals regional urban form—or does it? The metropolitan regions defined by the 1980 U.S. census contain an average of about 100 governments of one kind or another—counties, cities, towns or townships, school districts, and various other special purpose districts (3). But individual decisions by these many local governments reflect differing preferences for the living environment and often stake out competitiveness rather than shared positions. Such decisions usually create externalities that alter development parameters in other communities. Responses to those externalities occur at different times. So the sum of land use decisions by individual local governments rarely shapes up to a cohesive regional land use pattern.

This is the case particularly in rapidly growing cities, counties, and towns that are attempting to accommodate or stem the tide of development. Many of these jurisdictions have adopted the point of view that “less is more”—that reducing development densities, fending off projects that generate traffic, and encouraging up-scale construction will make their political and residential life more pleasant. Such communities tend to condition approvals of development projects on drastic reductions in proposed multifamily housing, increases in lot sizes, cutbacks in commercial retail development, and extensive reservations of open space. In practice, these individual decisions that generally reduce densities deflect urban growth into the countryside, virtually eliminating opportunities for transit service and excluding families that need moderate-cost housing.

At the metropolitan level, such practices encourage suburban and exurban sprawl, with consequent losses of open space, agricultural lands, and environmental resources and mounting requirements for expansions of infrastructure systems. Most metropolitan areas are experiencing a shortage of affordable housing located reasonably near employment centers. Most have grave difficulties siting locally undesirable land uses, which now include major highway corridors.

### **Waiting in the Wings: Regional Councils**

Regional organizations exist in almost every metropolitan area to provide forums for coordinating the plans of local governments and in some cases to insist on meeting a certain standard of planning and implementation. Furthermore, in eight states, state governments also are watching over the machinations of local governments and providing state goals by which regional agencies can insist on more rational regulatory behavior by local governments. The National Association of Regional Councils counted 523 such regional organizations in 1985. Many of these serve primarily rural areas, but about 302 are based on metropolitan areas (4). Most are creations of states that carved out substate regions and encouraged or mandated formation of regional planning councils or agencies. Regional groups generally are organized as councils of local governments and act as regional service agencies for various functions such as economic development, environmental protection, and transportation planning.

Such regional organizations, unfortunately, are seldom effective in curbing the land use excesses of local governments or pursuing coordinated metropolitan growth strategies. Instead they provide data, services, and some planning:

- They often constitute the chief source of population and economic data and projections for regions and their component jurisdictions. Thus, by default they provide the parameters of future development planning for local governments. But local governments frequently argue over projections and modify them to meet their own needs. In the 1980s, also, regional projections frequently missed the mark.
- Regional agencies provide forums for reaching consensus among local governments about land use issues. Although such forums offer avenues for cooperation and coordination that otherwise do not exist, they often devolve into elaborate games of mutual backscratching rather than significant trade-offs among divergent interests.

- Regional agencies often provide clearinghouse functions or selected regionwide services of use to local governments. A few manage important infrastructure systems such as sewer and water or park systems. Many act as the designated agency for federal programs such as metropolitan transportation organizations, programs for the elderly, and job training.

- Regional agencies may prepare regional land use plans to coordinate local decision making, but many do not. A few states require regional agencies to adopt plans that coordinate local plans. Most do little more than stitch together local plans without proceeding to input any regional strategies.

What do these regional organizations accomplish “on the ground,” so to speak?

- Most regional plans are only advisory. Because relatively few regional agencies can coerce local governments to respect regional plans, they have no incentives to adopt regionwide strategies that vary significantly from plans of individual local governments. Some regional agencies—perhaps many—lack staff to track local plans to see how decisions are consistent with regional plans and forecasts. Furthermore, regional planning based on collations of local plans of necessity lags behind local plan making and plan changing.

- Agencies that have powers to require local plans to conform to regional or state goals frequently avoid the hard choices, because they remain chiefly or totally controlled by and financially dependent on their constituent local governments.

- The jurisdictions of most regional agencies encompass areas either too large or too small for effective control of metropolitan growth. Many include vast rural areas that will not be urbanized for decades, thus diffusing their urban focus. Many metropolitan councils of government, on the other hand, adhere to U.S. census regions that fail to include major urbanizing fringe jurisdictions. By definition, the planning orientation of most such regional organizations is a decade behind the metropolitan development process.

These characteristics of regional agencies suggest that the network for land use decisions in most regions largely bypasses significant regional inputs. Four types of regional organizations, however, offer potential models for effective metropolitan management of land use: environmentally based organizations, urban-oriented agencies, metro-

politan authorities, and agencies backed by state growth management legislation.

Regional organizations are able to mobilize support for regionwide strategic planning and action for issues considered serious enough and common enough to all jurisdictions to warrant special action. The principal issue that has merited that kind of attention is protection of special environmental features. Regional agencies set up to ensure protection of Lake Tahoe, the New Jersey Pinelands, the Columbia Gorge, the Chesapeake Bay, and similar natural treasures have been empowered to override local decision making and frequently do so. They are unusual, however, in having state and often federal charters that make them anomalies outside the general system of government.

Regional organizations that focus primarily on urban development issues rarely enjoy the types of powers given environmentally based agencies. The notable exceptions in Minneapolis–St. Paul, Minnesota, and Portland, Oregon, serve to point up the weaknesses of regional organizations in other metropolitan areas. The Portland and Twin City regional agencies possess substantial powers to influence local decision making on land use issues, including maintenance of urban growth boundaries and direct or collateral management of vital public service systems. Neither agency, however, comes close to being a “regional government,” because they provide only selected services and depend for the most part on consensus building and cooperative relationships with local governments, rather than coercive regulations.

Another type of regional organization that can make a significant impact on local land use is the regional authority or commission. These exist in many metropolitan areas to provide specific services to all or part of the region. Examples are the New York Port Authority, the Washington (D.C.) Suburban Sanitary Commission, and the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission in the Minneapolis–St. Paul area. The actions of these agencies can have important effects on local land use, and they often do. Many, however, are either formally or informally restricted from unilateral action in local jurisdictions, and their programs may not serve wider regional interests.

### **State Initiatives To Encourage Responsible Planning**

New state legislation to manage growth suggests that states will increase their influence over local decisions on land use. In the past 5 years seven states (Florida, New Jersey, Vermont, Maine, Rhode

Island, Georgia, and Washington) have enacted growth management laws, and several more appear to be gearing up to pass new statutes. A close inspection of this trend in the making, however, indicates that only Oregon, Vermont, and Florida have established a track record in state growth management, and their experiences to date are quite different. Seventeen years ago Oregon adopted a law requiring all local governments to plan according to specified state goals and prompting those jurisdictions to plan at some level of competence. Furthermore, the state goals have led local governments to adopt urban/rural boundaries and encourage higher-density housing, both intended to prevent urban sprawl. The Oregon law made no provision for statewide planning or for regional planning, except in the Portland area.

Florida adopted many elements of the Oregon system but added some other bells and whistles, including requirements for regional plan making, regional coordination of local planning, and concurrency of infrastructure improvements with development approvals. A 1975 Florida law also required regional planning councils to review developments of regional impact. Thus, Florida regional agencies, potentially at least, have been given a fair amount of power, but it remains to be seen how they will wield it. To date, few of them have used their powers significantly to change the direction of local planning. As an example, the mayor and vice-mayor of two neighboring Florida cities concerned with downtown redevelopment might be thought to be interested in regional initiatives that might constrain sprawl and refocus development toward their cities. Instead, neither professed any knowledge of his regional organization's planning for the region—to them it was essentially irrelevant. Another indication is the fact that although all Florida regional agencies were given power to mediate land use conflicts of local governments, to date none has used that power (C. Siemon, unpublished data).

Vermont's Act 250 (5) set up regional citizen's review boards to approve developments of regional impact. The boards act almost entirely outside the planning mechanism, having no requirement to adhere to local plans and no ability to prepare regional plans. The new act, 200 (6), sets up regional planning agencies, but their power is somewhat equivocal and has just been reduced through amendments.

A missing element in this discussion of state planning legislation is state planning, which in a direct land use sense is almost invisible. Several of the recent state laws, including Florida's, have required state agencies to prepare strategic plans and coordinate them with each other's and with local plans. These efforts have yet to pay off in coordinated approaches to influencing local land use. Of course,



individual departments have tremendous effects on local land use, such as health department rules for septic tanks. But states generally have no strategies to guide urban development. New Jersey is struggling to adopt a statewide land use plan, and may yet. With no legislated implementation strategy, its potential effects on development are unknown. On the other hand, New Jersey's fair-share housing laws, stimulated by Mt. Laurel decisions and responsible in part for state planning actions, are having some effect on where and how affordable housing is built in New Jersey.

An essential component of the land use game is federal and state environmental regulation. In their administration of environmental laws, environmental agencies have increasingly restricted the use of environmentally sensitive lands for urban development, backed up by many interest groups ready to enforce their demands in court. Again, these agencies and constituencies tend to be single-issue oriented, to be reactive to specific development proposals, and to lack a strategy for metropolitan land use and development.

Except in a few areas, therefore, most public decisions on land use still occur at the local level, guided only marginally by regional concerns. At the metropolitan level, decisions are weakly coordinated, discontinuous, incremental, and unsystematic. Most decisions are driven by consumers and voters who desire low-density development with a high degree of automobile mobility.

## **PUBLIC GOVERNANCE OF TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS**

Compared with the governance of land use, decision making for transportation systems is a model of clarity and rationality. Or is it? Starting at the level where public officials make commitments to transportation improvements, three types of decision making structures can be discerned, each of which takes place within different frameworks of governance. One is local governmental decisions in annual budgets to finance and construct local improvements—new roads, road widenings, traffic signals, contributions to transit systems, and so forth. The second is the local government's decision to shift some or all of these costs to developers through exactions or impact fees. The third is the state government's decision, usually after being prodded by local governments and developers, to fund transportation improvements manifest in annual budgets of state highway departments.

Many local governments undertake transportation improvements according to a 6-year capital improvements program (CIP), revised each year. The CIP schedule supposedly is based on analyses of needs, facility and system planning coordinated with land use planning, cost estimates, and projections of potential revenues to pay for improvements. The CIP is changed each year to reflect new needs, conform to budget realities—often shortfalls—and respond to “political sensitivities.” The last may include pressures from neighborhood groups and influential developers to block or reschedule improvements or requirements to shift priorities because of decreased or increased development. The consequence in virtually all jurisdictions is that the programs are only rough indicators of actual improvements. In fact, it appears that most such programs never keep pace with needs, much less fund improvements according to a rational schedule.

CIPs have another flaw: major improvements, especially those involving state or federal funding, are usually keyed to regional transportation plans developed by metropolitan planning organizations and to annual state programs of improvements. As will be seen later, these plans and programs may not reflect actual needs at the local level.

The second means of funding improvements is through developer exactions and impact fees. Ostensibly the improvements obtained through these means correspond to local, regional, and state plans for timing and design, but the process is skewed by the fact that developers are contributing cash, land, or facility construction. Such contributions often are treated essentially as “off-budget” funds, not subject to the same scheduling considerations as publicly funded improvements. In fact, the current favorite device for accomplishing much-needed construction in the face of funding shortages is to “allow” developers to “advance” local and state schedules of improvements. Developers whose projects fail adequate facilities tests are given the choice of either delaying their projects until the public schedule finally rolls around or funding improvements themselves.

This means that developers, if they can afford it, can call the shots on when improvements are made and often how they are made. They may negotiate understandings on improvement designs, phasing, and even location. These negotiations are not necessarily wrong (and may even instill more realism into decisions about construction needs and timing, especially if verified through development agreements) but tend to undermine the credibility of official programs.

The third process is a state’s decision to fund particular highway or transit improvements. And here the focus should be on the metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), which since 1962 have been

responsible for determining needs and priorities for metropolitan transportation improvements funded by state and federal funds. The famous "3C" mandate enacted in 1965 called for continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative planning for transportation, which in turn required the formation of metropolitan agencies that could coordinate state and local actions (7). Because this corresponded with the period of founding regional land use planning agencies, the two types of agencies were often combined. But MPOs are different from land use agencies in important ways. MPOs have boards usually appointed by governors and are closely affiliated with state transportation agencies, rather than beholden to local elected leaders. Therein lies the strength—and weakness—of MPOs. They are capable of looking beyond local concerns to deal with metropolitan needs and priorities, but much of what they do must pass muster with local governments that are not well integrated into the system.

MPOs have not proved to be as successful at coordination and cooperation as everyone had hoped. As with regional planning agencies, typically they have no implementing powers. They plan and program transportation improvements but are at the mercy of other state and local agencies to carry out plans. The state plays a mercurial role in the MPO planning and programming process. Because the MPO exists mostly to assure rational allocations of federal and state funding for transportation improvements, it would seem to have a lot of power. And MPOs' annual adoption of multiyear transportation improvement programs (TIPs) promises an orderly and thoughtful procedure for determining priorities for funding improvements. Such is seldom the case. State departments of transportation still carry the most influence in highway funding. If state officials suddenly want to switch project priorities or add or drop projects from the current year's program, the MPO's transportation improvement program can be and frequently is modified to reflect those changes. In other words, TIPs are just as vulnerable as local CIPs to political and other maneuvers. Furthermore, because federal regulations in 1982 allowed states to formulate and monitor their own programs, states are free to structure procedures that leave their hands untied by metropolitan agencies.

MPOs' records with local governments are also problematic. In the Washington, D.C., area, transportation planners trot out the tale of the "Incredible Shrinking Plan" as one explanation for traffic congestion. The comprehensive transportation plan carefully crafted in the 1960s to serve future traffic needs was amended time and again as various jurisdictions refused to retain important segments of planned

highways in their plans. Whole expressway corridors were dropped, as were innumerable feeder arterials. Now the plan cannot serve the needs of the existing population, much less the future one (8). That story has been played out in countless metropolitan areas. In addition, most MPOs are subject to local governments' ideas on land use, a problem discussed in the following section.

So MPOs are center stage for highlighting regional needs and meshing transportation with land use objectives, but are hobbled by the same problems as regional land use planning agencies. Left unsaid is that both types of agencies are drastically underfunded for accomplishing even their basic missions.

### **KEY INTERACTION POINTS IN LAND USE-TRANSPORTATION DECISION MAKING**

If the governmental decision making processes for land use and transportation systems are compared, three key points can be discerned at which coordinated action would contribute to effective metropolitan strategies for land use and transportation:

1. The reflection of regional forecasts of land use and transportation trends in local strategies for land use and transportation;
2. The synthesis or reconciliation of local plans in regional plans; and
3. The response of local governments to gaps and conflicts defined in the regional planning process.

### **Tailored Forecasts**

One of the key opportunities for coordinating local with regional development strategies concerns the periodic demographic and economic projections usually generated by regional agencies. Many regional agencies possess enough competence to employ complex computer models for regional projections and allocations to local areas. At the metropolitan scale, such projections are reasonably accurate and supply a useful accounting framework for projecting small-area trends in local jurisdictions, traffic zones, and so forth. MPOs usually base their traffic projections on such forecasts, and local governments rely on such projections for their planning of land use and transportation patterns. The forecasts thus provide an important mechanism for coordinating local with regional planning.

As is often the case, this straightforward model of intergovernmental behavior breaks down in practice. Three problems have emerged. First, at the local level, a variety of local cities, towns, and counties are intent on deciding their futures individually. They may, on their own initiative, use regional demographic and economic forecasts prepared by regional agencies, and may reflect regional transportation plans based on those forecasts in their own plans. Or they may, and often do, choose to modify regional forecasts and plans to suit their own ends, especially as the benchmarks of the decennial census fade in time. In addition, local governments may discount or resist use of periodic updates of long-term forecasts by regional agencies if the projections suggest the need for unwanted policy changes.

A second and perhaps more fundamental problem is that regional allocations of demographic and employment projections to individual jurisdictions are based on the adopted plans of local jurisdictions. Indeed, in many regions the initial round of inputs for projections is furnished by local planners who derive their numbers from official plans and zoning. These sources, however, may reflect exclusionary attitudes or desires to emphasize particular types of development regardless of market realities or may simply be obsolete. Nevertheless, if West Podunk plans and zones large acreages for 2-acre lots, the projections will reflect that policy position. If, on the other hand, East Podunk decides to become a powerhouse employment area by reserving a quarter of the town for industrial purposes, that goal, too, must be recognized in the forecasts. Although such plans are modified to some extent when used in forecasting models—which usually control projections within regional and area totals—regional numbers must to some extent reflect local policies on land use, thus disciplining the projections in sometimes surreal ways.

Central cities, for example, frequently protest projections that show stable or declining growth in population and employment. A recent check with MPOs in the Denver and Miami areas illustrates the point: elected officials in both cities routinely insist that projections indicate substantial growth for their cities, despite steady losses in residents and jobs over many years. Transportation planners in Denver coped with suburban Aurora's plan for seven regional shopping centers in a 7-square-mile area by instructing their model to eliminate one in every five centers. These accommodations to fit forecasts to local policies appear to be quite common.

The third problem is that local officials undoubtedly peg their visions of land use futures on their sense of likely transportation improvements, thus creating a chicken-and-egg situation. Local plans

seldom evolve from a zero base on a clean playing field. Local officials have been playing the land use and transportation game for years; past plans and actions have set the parameters of probable futures. Absent bold proposals or major policy shifts by regional or state agencies, why should local governments assume that radical new strategies are possible or probable? Thus, local plans are likely to be based on assumptions that past land use and transportation interactions and patterns will be maintained.

These problems mean that land use and transportation strategies become caught in a policy loop that protects the status quo. Local government planning for land use and transportation inevitably is based on projections already reflecting presumptions about future development strategies. Furthermore, to the extent that local objectives do not match regional projections, local governments are quite willing to "take down" allocations of expected growth different from those that regional agencies propose to allocate to them. Except in a few areas, local governments are not enjoined to accept fair share allocations of regional projections. Thus, the potential discipline that regional forecasts might provide to guide local plan making is frequently flouted.

### **Reconciling Regional and Local Plans**

The second key transaction point involves the synthesis of local plans with regional land use and transportation plans. Through this process, regional agencies have an opportunity to introduce regional visions of metropolitan development, which in turn may provide a framework for local plans and a means of meshing land use and transportation objectives and intentions. Regional agencies also can point up conflicts between regional and local objectives and take steps to reconcile differences.

Unfortunately, in most metropolitan areas this approach to assuring that regionwide development strategies are addressed falls prey to the governance gap. Although MPOs are required to prepare regional transportation plans, other regional planning agencies often have no mission to draw up regional land use plans. Lacking that, they often fall back on assembling local plans, tailoring the rough edges to make them fit but otherwise accepting local expectations for future development. Even if regional agencies prepare plans that represent regional interests, they generally have no way to impose regional priorities on local plans. MPOs, through the implementing actions of state transportation departments, may have some influ-

ence over local transportation planning, but most regional development plans have only advisory status. As an illustration, the recent massive planning effort carried out by the Puget Sound Council of Governments was based on urban development extending only to Lake Sammamish, but hardly before the ink was dry on the plan, a new 5,000-acre mixed use development was approved east of the lake. Thus, local governments are rarely called on to abide by regional plans, much less consider regional priorities. Even in those states that have state-mandated regional and local planning requirements, regional agencies have limited powers to engage in effective strategic planning.

### **Failures in Feedback**

The third key point at which local and regional interaction might afford opportunities for consideration of regional interests is in feedback of regional forecasting and planning exercises to local governments. Apparently, however, most regional planning agencies do a poor job of reporting back to local governments the implications of such analyses for local plans, and an even poorer job of encouraging local governments to amend their plans to reconcile conflicts. The process works to accept and mold local plans to the requirements of regional forecasting and allocation models, but little information filters back to local governments. Models employed by the Puget Sound and Metro Dade agencies, for instance, internally balance land use allocations among jurisdictions and small areas, but the ways in which such changes match up with local plans are never determined. Seldom are MPOs able to suggest to local governments that their land use policies result in unworkable transportation systems and should therefore be revised.

On the basis of evidence from several regional agencies, such intergovernmental communication is short-circuited in many cases by staff shortages at both regional and local levels. On a purely informational basis, those local governments with professional staffs usually manage to keep up some interchange of information about regional activities, but too many small suburban and rural communities are understaffed for such purposes. When staff members at the Denver Council of Governments, for example, tell local planners about revisions in planned land uses that are made in the course of running the traffic forecast model, they are greeted with blank stares and shrugs.

The key point here is that local governments can choose to ignore regional plans with impunity, and frequently never learn about the

plans of neighboring jurisdictions until too late to negotiate compromises or head off bad decisions.

## **TOWARD EFFECTIVE METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE**

What metropolitan areas need and seldom have are regional agencies capable of looking out for the metropolitan good, agencies that can raise the planning horizon from individual corridor studies and project approvals to thinking about the future development of the region as a whole, including how land use development should correspond with transportation system improvements. Such regional agencies would then possess the conceptual base for evaluating local plans against regional objectives and for calling attention to regional prerogatives.

To accomplish this end, such organizations should have both the mission and budget to formulate workable regional plans, should have some powers to influence funding allocations and implementing regulations throughout the region, and should be capable of overriding decisions of individual local governments on critical issues. At a minimum, such agencies should be responsible for determining the conformance of local plans with regional plans and reporting inconsistencies to local governments. Although regional organizations need not—and probably should not—possess comprehensive powers for planning and managing growth and development, experience with the present ineffectual systems indicates that they must have some administrative and funding capabilities to influence the actions of local governments.

How can such a model of regional governance be achieved? Four directions of research might elicit useful answers to that question.

### **Forming a Metropolitan Vision**

Before great strides can be taken toward effective strategies for metropolitan development, a new vision of the metropolitan region as the living space most Americans inhabit must be formed. The vision must be as persuasive to metropolitan citizens as the dream of rural landscapes and living styles has been to generations of Americans. Analytic explorations of the metropolis as a network of nurturing environments for living, working, and enjoying recreational activities would encourage planners of future urban areas to consider ways to weave land use and transportation systems together. The vision would encompass concepts of living and working spaces mutually related



to transportation and other infrastructure systems and to natural preserves that provide breathing room for urban residents. The governance role of regional institutions would evolve from this new understanding of metropolitan futures.

### **Defining a Metropolitan Constituency**

A constituency of concerned citizens would be fundamental to work toward the vision of the future metropolis, much as the environmental movement has galvanized action on environmental issues at all levels of society. The urban quality of life that could be realized in metropolitan regions can be pictured as a genus endangered by current shortcomings in regional governance. The status quo in metropolitan development threatens everyone's quality of life, a fact that can be underscored by descriptions of major issues, such as traffic and waste disposal, poorly addressed by our present system of regional nonplanning. We need to define closely the many interests affected by such problems, including business and consumer groups, who might support more effective metropolitan management of land use and transportation development.

### **Improving the Data Base on Regional Models**

The various models of regional governance existing today provide a rich source of information that has largely been untapped. These models should be evaluated for their effectiveness under a variety of circumstances. Whether state backed or locally subscribed, such organizations should be analyzed to determine the critical functions they may provide and the roles they might be empowered to play. Such analyses should also seek better information on the interplay of land use and transportation relationships in metropolitan growth and development—the principal substantive concern of regional governance.

### **Defining New Programmatic and Regulatory Techniques**

Regional actions to determine and effectuate related land use and transportation futures will only come from federal and state initiatives to support such actions. Alternative program and regulatory initiatives at federal and state levels should be examined. Should transportation agencies, for example, require demonstrations of the linkage of proposed transportation improvements to supportive and responsible land use goals? Or should urban mobility be subject to a

“no net loss” policy similar to the current federal wetlands policy? Could transportation agencies express a clear preference for local governments that coordinate their plans with regional goals? Should state transportation agencies formulate state policies for supporting metropolitan development? If so, what types of policies might be considered? How might federal and state agencies leverage local requirements for making development contingent on “adequate facilities”? What funding support, even taxing powers, might regional agencies acquire to provide them means for effective leadership in metropolitan growth and development?

In conclusion, it bears repeating that the institutional framework created for decision making in land use and transportation issues succeeds in the objectives set for it: avoiding intrusion into local decision making and perpetuating the status quo. Somehow, the widening reality gap must be bridged with workable, regionwide institutions of governance.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to thank Robert Dunphy, Director of Transportation Research at the Urban Land Institute, and his research associate, Kim Fisher, for their mini-survey of metropolitan planning organizations and helpful information on the origin and operations of such organizations.

## REFERENCES

1. A. Downs. *The Need For a New Vision for the Development of Large U.S. Metropolitan Areas*. Salomon Brothers, New York, August 1989.
2. D. Dubbink. I'll Have Mine Medium Rural, Please. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Autumn 1984.
3. *The Practice of State and Regional Planning* (F. S. So, I. Hand, and B. D. McDowell, eds.). American Planning Association, Chicago, Ill., 1986, p. 133.
4. *Directory of Regional Councils, 85-86*. National Association of Regional Councils, Washington, D.C., 1986.
5. Vermont Environmental Board. Act 250, Title 10, Chapter 151, 1970.
6. Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs. Act 200, Title 24, Chapter 117, Effective July 1, 1988.
7. Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962. PL 87-866, October 3, 1962.
8. G. V. Wickstrom. Forecasts of Anticipated Travel Demand for the Washington Area. *The 1990s and Beyond: Critical Choices for the Washington Metropolitan Region*. Proceedings of a Regional Conference on Growth and Transportation, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and the Transportation Planning Board, Washington, D.C., 1989.