
America's Metro Regions Take Center Stage

8 Reasons Why

Regions Refine Federalism:
Analysis by the Citistates Group
With Reflections from a Pocantico Conference



April 2012

America's Metro Regions Take Center Stage: 8 Reasons Why

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Contents

Introduction: America's Regions Take Center Stage	1
Reason 1: Economics Now Reign	3
Reason 2: Smart Growth: Regions' New Dollars and Sense	6
Reason 3: Regions on Their Own	9
Reason 4: Getting Down to Business.....	12
Reason 5: But Business Means More Than Business	15
Reason 6: States Moving from Paternalism to Partnership.....	18
Reason 7: A New Federal Role	22
Reason 8: All About Outcomes.....	25
Symposium Participants	26
Resources	27

America's Metro Regions Take Center Stage

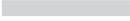
Introduction

METROPOLITAN REGIONS are the dominant demographic and physical form, the citistates of the 21st century. They're the critical base for the globalized economy. In a world of expanding trade flows and borderless economies, they represent a framework—flexible, organic, creative—that makes practical sense.

Some metros are far larger in population than entire states (or even nations). Yet because of their relative compactness, metros—even those with millions of population—offer more opportunities for direct connections, to deal pragmatically with shared challenges, than either states or nation states. Face-to-face contact makes it possible for metro economies, universities, transportation, environmental systems to work in tandem. Metros can bring many sectors to the table and forge widely supported agendas. They are arenas to build relationships and trust—respect, empathy, inclusiveness—in stark contrast with the divisive partisanship and ideologies that easily paralyze decision-making at the level of states and nations.

Collectively, metros now represent an overwhelming share (the largest 100 alone are 66 percent) of the United States' population—and even more of its economy. They're home to all but a few corporate headquarters and financial institutions. They're centers of innovation, the site of most of the nation's great universities, the 21st century's hotbeds of innovation and talent building. Without them, the United States would be a pale shadow of its present self.

But—metros are also well described as “messy.” Regional problem-solving is usually complicated, difficult, frustrating and full of surprises. Each multi-jurisdictional issue has its own scale and scope, its own “region”—sometimes the same as, sometimes quite different from regions designated by state governments. Many challenges are made all the more complex when the physical region actually spreads across state lines. (There are actually 30 such regions in the U.S. today). Regional accords don't always come easily—they're more often the fruit of grit and public interest vision. They're about working through competing interests and values, dealing with disagreements but also searching out new synergies, compatible goals. An essential component: broad-minded regional leadership—political, business, university, foundation or other, that can see beyond differences to mutual gain.



Metros can bring many sectors to the table and forge widely supported agendas.



INTRODUCTION

A vibrant federal system is critical to the well-being and progress of the American nation and all its people. But there's a serious disconnect as metropolitan citistate regions become the focal point of the nation's population and lead players in its economy. Federal policy is barely catching up with their needs and priorities. And state governments, which hold vast (in fact absolute) legal power over the splintered governance, often support their urban regions even less.

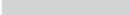
Aware of the disparities, the Citistates Group—an informal association of journalists and other professionals concerned about viable 21st century regions—undertook a fresh analysis of the problem, partnering with the Community Growth Education Fund of the American Chamber of Commerce Executives. The initial focus was on state-region relations and the clear lack of regional autonomy.

But generous support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund to hold a conference at its Pocantico estate on the Hudson River provided an opportunity to tap the thinking of a distinguished cross-section of close observers and operational veterans of metropolitan affairs and governance. And the discussions, at an October 2011 session, yielded a surprise. The panelists found metro regions on an upward swing—increasingly recognized and influential.

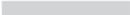
The result was less focus on problematic rules and regulations of the state and federal governments (though those issues haven't gone away). Rather, the conferees concentrated on the ways that many regions are starting to assert themselves where it really counts today: as economic forces important not just to themselves, but to the entire nation, and as players on the world stage. The clear conclusion: a more expansive range of more supportive policies, both at the state or federal levels, could yield critically important results for the nation as a whole

While this report reflects and builds on many of the ideas raised at the Pocantico sessions—the authors' "take" on many of the themes that were introduced—it's definitely not a formal group report. Several of the attendees did follow up with essays expressing their individual views, which can be seen at the Citistates Group's website (www.citiwire.com).

In addition to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, support for this project was contributed by the William Penn Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. The authors are most grateful to all, but hasten to note that the viewpoints expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the foundations or their staffs.



Regional problem-solving is usually complicated, difficult, frustrating and full of surprises.



Reason 1

Economics Now Reign

As domestic consumerism falters and the United States faces increasingly strong competition on every front from manufacturing to specialized higher education, smart metropolitan economic clusters become more vital than ever. Regions that can't craft clear development strategies, distinctive domestically or globally but preferably both, face bleak prospects. The challenge requires having "all hands on deck"—each region's metropolitan chambers of commerce, universities, lead corporations and community foundations, working collaboratively to define and then create the conditions that invite investment and prepare people with the knowledge and skills they need to participate.

This doesn't mean that the existing issues of metropolitan region's governance, the ties and conflicts among cities, counties, regions and states, have disappeared. But they're not getting the headlines they once did. Hit by the economic downturn of recent years, regions across the United States have placed priority, more than ever, on the bottom line—developing industries, creating jobs, fighting off decline. And in one sense regions should be well positioned because they're more coherent as economic entities than either their entire states or their individual cities or suburbs.

Economic competitiveness has emerged as a great unifier for regions, a rallying point for individuals with different political affiliations and groups with different agendas. What's evolving is a set of visions, varied methods, by which regions at various points of development grasp the idea of collaborative economic strategies—not unlike the mix of strategies and approaches that emerged from the Progressive good government movement a century ago. Collaboration is the key, but leadership remains critical.

Seeing the world

An increasing number of regions, looking for markets, are focusing more efforts globally and are following the lead of such citistates as New York, Los Angeles, Dallas and Seattle, which early on worked to bolster their international trade position by capitalizing on their seaports and airports. Combined agendas of financing, marketing, and goods distribution are all part of the picture.

These regions recognized earlier than most that the entire world is now the operative platform for imagining things, designing new products and services, plus manufacturing, sales and distribution. Today nearly everything can be done from nearly everywhere. For example, even the term "outsourcing" is fast fading; there is no more "out," only sourcing.

A prime example of this foresight is the 21-year old Trade Development Alliance of Greater Seattle, a joint effort involving all of the region's counties, major cities, ports and unions coordinated by the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce. The rationale was clear in the organization's tag line: "recognition that new local partnerships are necessary to retain our region's future competitiveness in a rapidly changing global economy." In addition to extensive international trade and study tours, the Alliance has a marketing kit in 18 languages, focused on research, manufacturing, environment and global health. Globally connected corporations such as Boeing and Microsoft are involved.

Former long-time Alliance head Bill Stafford often described their international visits as a way to introduce his region to the world (and leaders in other major international citistates to the Puget Sound region), building cultural as well as economic understanding and forging relationships.

Achieving serious political coherence

Anything more ambitious than ordinary logistics demands a heightened regional coherence. A prime example was the effort that went into constructing the Alameda Corridor project, a 20-mile freight expressway to move goods from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach through the region. The effort involved removing blockages and lawsuits that were threatening the development of the ports.

Negotiated by the Southern California Association of Governments, the resolution involved painstaking negotiations among a mind-boggling list of regional agencies, big railway corporations, local governments and businesses, transit agencies, and community groups. Benefits ranged from expedited traffic to public health (reduction of noxious emissions), while undergirding Los Angeles' competitive position to handle trade shipments pouring in from Asia and Latin America. A brand new organization was formed to make the deal succeed—the Alameda Corridor Authority. A federal loan accelerated the development of the project, but the leadership came from within.

But will the trade focus of the U.S., the Alameda Corridors of the future, help the country turn around its high trade deficit, creating goods and services with the quality, the inventiveness, and the price points to compete more robustly on an international scale? And to compete even when many foreign governments unabashedly subsidize individual firms and technologies, and invest in ambitious infrastructure (high-speed rail, for example) in ways that the U.S. political culture resists? The answer may lie less in Washington or state capitals (though their help is needed) than in the ingenuity and cohesion of America's metros.

Regions that can't craft clear development strategies, distinctive domestically or globally but preferably both, face bleak prospects.

REASON 1: Economics Now Reign

That ingenuity must include a heavy dose of transformation-level thinking, while hewing to the central challenge to create the conditions that prepare people, preserve the environment, and foster investment both private and public. It means gearing up angel and venture capital. It means a struggle for environmental quality, clean air and water, and quality of place. It means building a qualified workforce, with strong regional support for higher learning—a base of strong community colleges but also universities with research laboratories that can create new, improved, and potentially marketable technologies.

Looking forward it may involve frontiers regional organizations have rarely if ever addressed. One notable example would be K-12 educational quality—a serious commitment to apply American-style ingenuity and innovation to the chronic challenges in inner cities and struggling suburbs that have the lowest tax base availability yet highest preponderance of behind-grade students.



Economic competitiveness
has emerged as a great unifier
for regions.



Reason 2

Smart Growth: Regions' New Dollars and Sense

From an issue first clothed in environmentalism, pushed by reform-minded planners from the early 1990s forward, the idea of more strategic and conserving development—“smart growth”—has evolved dramatically. Today it is a clear economic priority for regions.

The history is familiar. Starting immediately after World War II, the United States went on a decades-long growth tear. Each year vast amounts of previously open space and farmland yielded to development. The Sunbelt exploded with growth. Even older Northeast and Midwest regions with static or declining populations expanded dramatically in the size of their physical footprint. The accelerators were homebuilders and office real estate interests, national chain stores, corporate office parks and road builders, and Wall Street funding that was limited to a narrow set of standard development forms. Decline of center cities and racial divisions were largely assumed to be among the prices to pay for the American way.

Then, in the early 1990s, New Urbanists and other advocates began to lay the groundwork for what, in time, would be called America's smart growth movement. And from the start, the reformers' values of more compact and less sprawling communities, of the quality of the physical and built environment, of land conservation—were clearly regional in scope. Over time advocates increasingly claimed the gain for cities and regions that could advertise high quality of life, focused on lively town centers and quality neighborhoods, as a powerful tool for cities and regions to attract and hold a talented workforce. Advocates began to add issues of equity—a focus on shared opportunity and diversity. And the issue of climate change emerged, underscoring the dangers to the planet in wasteful expansion, as well as the huge economic savings available to individuals, businesses and governments through more conservationist, low-energy demand practices.

Then came the dramatic jolt to the old order when gasoline prices suddenly escalated north of \$4 a gallon—followed in 2008 by the heavy blow of the Great Recession, triggering the loss of millions of jobs and home foreclosures soaring, especially in fringe suburbs. And it was crystal clear: our economy, our communities were in for radical change.

REASON 2: Smart Growth Transformed: Regions' New Dollars and Sense

Today the smart growth case for economically efficient, compact, pedestrian-friendly, “green” communities, for restraining new land use, for less auto and more public transit use, has become the most economically feasible scenario for development of the cities and regions that are home to a vast majority of the U.S. population in an ever-more metropolitan nation. The idea of conserving natural resources had become joined with the idea of conserving public resources.

Indeed, in the new economics of land development, sprawl looks like financial disaster, both for developers and buyers. No level of government can afford further extension of the road system, or its long-term upkeep. Houses at the edge of metros have cratered in value, marooning many who thought that the “drive until you qualify” rule was a safe standard. While the majority of buyers still select a house outside the central cities, more and more they’re picking a place that is a real community, with sidewalks and connections and urban amenities. Smart suburbs, especially those close in, have awakened to this movement and are fast adapting.

That doesn’t mean political leaders necessarily recognize the sprawl-high cost connection. Or that non-urban areas won’t continue, where they can, spread development.

A case in point: opposition to the “Plan Maryland” land use proposal put forth by Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley. From 11 percent in 1973, developed land has advanced to 27 percent of Maryland’s land area. State planners have projected that 400,000 acres of land currently in agricultural or forest use will likely be lost to development in the next 20 years.

Gov. O’Malley is seeking to prevent much of that expansion by denying state funds to rural areas that fail to channel most development into established towns. Supporters say the plan will deter harmful runoff into the Chesapeake Bay and save some millions yearly in state subsidies to counties for new schools, sewers and roadway construction. Rural counties and Republican lawmakers have declared the effort—which is based on executive order rather than legislation—a virtual war on rural Marylanders’ property rights.

While much is changing on the land-use, regional transportation and energy fronts, the shift is largely driven by market realities and consumer decisions. Lagging far behind are any discernible systems to achieve some semblance of regional coherence in policy and investments. Federal analysis, for example, shows that more than half of the average U.S. homeowner’s income goes for housing and transportation, ample reason to embrace growth strategies that at least reduce commuting distances and costs. But translating that finding into actual regional policy making is—politically—“a stretch.”



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REASON 2: Smart Growth Transformed: Regions' New Dollars and Sense

The nation also has a regional infrastructure of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Can they, will they pick up this challenge and pursue an aggressive regional agenda? (see box, page 000) Will the national government do anything to give MPOs a new form, with new incentives?

Looking at that prospect in 2012, skepticism is the smart mood. If regions are to organize to achieve a coherent policy on how land is used, where development occurs and what kind of development it is—not to mention how people and goods will move around in the region—they will have to commit acts of policy and financial audacity and do it on their own. But they'll have one asset denied them for the half century following World War II: a compelling case that environmental conservation and more compact growth, represents the best economic path forward as well.

Reason 3

Regions on Their Own

However contradictory it may sound, in today's politics of regions, no one's in charge and everyone is responsible. No longer able to look to the federal government for much assistance, leaders in regions now have to design their own new models for fending off trouble and addressing their challenges. Inside the regional boundary, the fiery partisan debates that spark national headlines and blogs each day matter very little. The metropolitan regions in the United States are entering, however cautiously, a critical intersection. Some will figure out a formula to coalesce around common interests and find a way to thrive in the new realities. Others will not, and will see their economic prospects wither.

First steps are obvious: wake up and see how much has changed. Public budgets—federal, state and local—are seriously constrained. The performance of the nation's education system now lags that of international competitors. The state of the nation's basic infrastructure is slip-sliding toward third-world conditions. Individuals and families living in poverty now reside more outside central cities than within. And other nations around the world are catching up, pushing hard and fast to be competitive places.

All that said, there's a case to be made that America has a bright future. It still has immense resources and a population culturally conditioned to rise to challenges. But in each metropolitan region, where most Americans live and work, the nation has decided by default to make these challenges local. And that means regional, because no city in a metropolitan region can do what needs to be done all by itself.

This explains the emergence of new governance arrangements. Over the past decade mayors have been organizing themselves into coalitions—notably in Chicago, Denver, Philadelphia, and Minneapolis Saint Paul. These arrangements are not official but they are quite serious; where they've emerged they are platforms where elected officials voluntarily confess that there are problems and opportunities that surpass their city's capacity, that they need help from around the region to be successful.

It is notable to see how much these informal governance arrangements not only have an impact on regional policy, but reduce the likelihood of intraregional "friendly fire" negating the economic prospects of participating cities.

*Reason 3 continues on page 11.
See sidebar on page 10.*

In today's politics of regions,
no one's in charge and
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The Denver and Atlanta Stories **East or West—compelling ideas can crash through political walls**

Whether it's a heritage of a more ambitious cultural DNA or the work of the gods of serendipity, some regions seem exceptionally willing to step out first, take a risk, and confront a major problem head-on. Examples from Denver and Atlanta help to tell the story

In 2004, Denver region voters decided, 57 percent to 42 percent, to back FasTracks—a \$4.7 billion initiative to build some 122 miles of light rail and commuter rail, plus another 18 miles of bus rapid transit. It would be an authentically regional system reaching out as far as Boulder and the Denver airport. Gov. Bill Owens, conservative think tanks, and auto dealers opposed FasTracks. But they were rolled over by a previously unthinkable alliance of then-Mayor John Hickenlooper of Denver, supported by 30 of his fellow mayors across the region—plus environmentalists, real estate development organizations, and the Greater Denver Chamber of Commerce. (A light rail proposal four years earlier, lacking the broad base of support, had failed).

Fifty-one of the 57 stations originally envisioned along Denver's FasTracks lines were expected to pose major opportunities for transit-oriented development (TODs)—compact new, transit-served communities in which people can live, work, dine or shop in urban settings with significantly reduced auto needs.

Citing the FasTracks experience, Hickenlooper, now Colorado's governor, notes: Regionwide "collaboration is like a muscle: the more you use it, the stronger it gets." Among regions today, he said in 2011, "collaboration is the new competition."

Another example: Atlanta. Expanding at dizzying speed in recent decades (though now in early 2012 leading the nation in declining housing values), metropolitan Atlanta found itself over a decade ago convulsed by world-class traffic congestion, its existing road and anemic public transportation systems increasingly inadequate. The situation threatened to trigger some corporate defections and represented a red flag for potential new employers. Alarmed, the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce began a multi-year campaign to persuade the Georgia legislature to let Atlanta the counties of the Atlanta region hold a referendum on a one-cent sales tax increase to pay for roadway and transit improvements.

Yet, even though the extra penny sales tax would be paid only by Atlanta region residents, resistance in the legislature proved difficult to overcome, reflecting a state history of deep rural and small town antipathy to the capital city. (Nationally state governments provide about 15 percent of their cities' operating budgets, but for Georgia cities the figure is just 5 percent. And for Atlanta it's 2 percent.) Among many sticking points, one was who would decide on the expenditures if a referendum succeeded. Atlanta's leadership was not willing to let Georgia's historically powerful state Department of Transportation make the decisions. Yet, over time the Chamber and its allies gained support, partly by letting it be known that candidates for state office who didn't support the measure might see their campaign contributions from Atlanta-area donors imperiled.

But prospects remained uncertain until Gov. Sonny Perdue, a conservative Republican, stepped into the debate in early 2010. His proposal was simple, and radical: Let the proposal to go forward, with its possible 1-cent sales tax for transportation. But authorize the process not just for metro Atlanta, but for all 12 Georgia regions.

Incorporating that compromise, the bill passed in 2010. The 12 districts were defined as be those of existing regional commissions. Each region was to be required to hold a "roundtable" including mayors and county representatives, with an executive committee including area legislators. The roundtable would produce an investment list of transportation projects – highways, rail or public transit – coordinated across jurisdictional boundaries. The Georgia Department of Transportation would offer advice on projects' feasibility. The list of projects would require voter approval, district by district (starting with initial votes in 2012). The tax, if approved, would be imposed for 10 years, with the regional commissions' continuing oversight of approved projects. (Legislative maneuvering in the Georgia Legislature's 2011 session threatened to derail the process, although the concept of district-by-district voter decision on major public investment, a potential boon for major metro areas, had been brought into public dialogue – and offered a model for other states to consider.)

Reason 3 continues on page 11.

REASON 3: Regions On Their Own

Reason 3 continued from page 9.

Like many American phenomena that had origins in the creative juices of the Silicon Valley, this tendency to voluntarily get organized as a region was pioneered by Joint Venture Silicon Valley, a network of political, business, civic, and academic leaders that formed in the early '90s to help assure the continued competitiveness of the region.

An early achievement, however modest, was on a core issue of metropolitan efficiency: a “Smart Permit” exercise of getting 25 local cities together, agreeing to a streamlining of their building codes, and making the codes standard across the region. Another is the yearly publication of a Silicon Valley Index that tracks the Valley’s progress and challenges based on tough analysis, realistic numbers, released and discussed before an audience of more than 1,000 local stakeholders.

Often regions gain coherence by focusing on difficult challenges. One example of long standing is the Oregon Business Council an organization of CEOs focused on a relevant civic agenda. In St. Louis, the Regional Commerce and Growth Association was able to catalyze a long string of significant regional initiatives. Denver and Atlanta made breakthroughs with civic environmentalists, chambers of commerce and committed local governments. *(For a description of the Denver and Atlanta regions’ campaigns, see box on “Landmark Regional Breakthroughs, p. 10)*

The bottom line is clear: Regions that organize, assemble broad support coalitions, can break through historic resistance and register advances. Even smaller regions, utilizing today’s advanced information technology, now have the means to develop sophisticated development plans. It’s a matter of will, intelligence, strategy—and building strong coalitions, a “networked governance” model for the times.



Regions that organize,
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and register advances.



Reason 4

Getting Down to Business

Economics, wealth, productivity. How do regions leverage their skills and resources? How do they position themselves to get into the World Series of job competition?

“Business plans” and “cities” or “regions” are terms not normally seen in the same sentence. Almost always, when there is regional agreement on anything, it results from political compromise, some deal made that trades off benefits and risks. Rarely is there an actual underlying strategy, agreed to by the cities in the region, used as a roadmap for leaders to do their work.

But this may be changing. The Brookings Institution is a key change agent on this agenda. By sponsoring the development of what they called ‘business plans’ in selected regional markets, Brookings has pushed a change in the way the challenge is framed. Regional business plans were initially developed, from Brookings support, in three test markets—Seattle, Minneapolis-Saint Paul, and Northeast Ohio.

Minneapolis-Saint Paul is a useful example. It’s a region that still has the nation’s largest number (now at 20) of Fortune 500 headquarters per capita. That number used to be much higher, before mergers and acquisitions took their toll. Still, what American region would not envy this base of large enterprises?

So in this region new models have emerged. One is the Itasca Project, a coalition of some 50 CEOs who are focused on the regional civic agenda. With Brookings’ guidance, the Minnesota chapter of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) produced a business plan in 2011 that focused on how to leverage the advantages of the existing economic clusters of the region. This is an area that for decades took a regional approach to a wide range of challenges—from better treatment of wastewater to transit to land use planning. But these efforts rarely connected to how the regional economy was performing, and were never rooted in anything resembling formalized strategy. With the support of Brookings and ULI, a rather sophisticated strategy—called a “business plan,” was articulated and publicly embraced.

For the first time, otherwise competing mayors and county commissioners of a 14-county, 187-city region agreed to underwrite one economic development office: the Greater MSP. Even five years ago, no one in the region would have predicted that there could be this degree of coalescence.

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REASON 4: *Getting Down to Business*

But regions are on their own in this regard, and they need to get organized for the challenge. Meanwhile, the need is immense, says Bruce Katz, director of the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program, a lead advocate of the concept. To survive in the new global economy, he suggests, each metro needs to mobilize its array of wealth, human talent, and special assets—to be “purposeful, deliberate, collaborative, pragmatic.”

Another regional business planning effort has been underway in Northeast Ohio—the region of Cleveland and its sister cities of Akron and Youngstown, erstwhile continental champions in steel, rubber, chemicals, and auto assembly that were thrown onto the economic ropes by the decline of U.S. manufacturing in recent decades. Here, a strong initiative has been advanced by, among other actors, the “Fund for Our Economic Future,” a consortium of more than 50 regional foundations with an unprecedented collection of the area's local government, business, civic, and academic leaders. Aimed at boosting the productivity of the region's 1,600 small to mid-sized manufacturing firms, the new initiative is working firm by firm with a select group of the region's small- and medium-sized enterprises to help transition more of them into higher-value, growing lines of production.

Regional business plans start to proliferate

Through firm-by-firm consulting, the new strategy focuses on areas of growth opportunity such as manufacture of wind turbine parts. But more generally, to tap the collaboration's new business planning, marketing insights and analysis, capitalizing on ties to the region's university labs and lending institutions. The idea, as one supporter puts it, is to spark creativity and growth by such innovations as taking “a Rolls Royce facility in fuel cells in North Canton, hooking up with Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, with polymer technology in Akron, and materials and metal strength in Youngstown.”

And for the Seattle-Puget Sound region—Seattle, Tacoma, Bellevue and their neighbors—a new energy efficiency applications testing center and network has been developed with the goal of turning the region's enviable cluster of building-control software and energy efficiency firms into a major global exporter. The idea is to seize on the massive export opportunity implicit in the growing national and global market for the latest technologies and services to boost the energy efficiency of buildings.

Similarly, the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership, which includes higher education leaders as well as business leaders, has developed a blueprint for economic progress over recent years. It is focused on key clusters of advanced manufacturing, the life sciences, distribution logistics, and information technology, with a strong emphasis on entrepreneurship and economic diversity.

REASON 4: Getting Down to Business

On a parallel track, the Climate Prosperity Project has worked with four regions—Denver, St. Louis, Portland and Silicon Valley—to help corporations (as well as local governments, universities and other groups) create “greenprints” to help them save money and increase their efficiency and competitiveness. A broad array of related strategies—led by green building standards, renewable energy, efficient water use and reuse, alternative fuel vehicles—are employed.

In St. Louis, nearly 70 firms responded to the St. Louis Green Business Challenge inspired and coordinated by the St. Louis Regional Commerce and Growth Association. Sports teams, corporations and NGOs showcased their advances in technology, energy efficiency, and waste reduction, in effect challenging each other to show progress. Corporations promised to make significant energy use reductions, partly through the creation of internal “green teams.” Nearly two-thirds of the firms adopted a green purchasing policy and more than half pledged to reduce waste by 25 percent.

Reason 5

But Business Means More Than Business

Successful and resilient regions “get it that economic success involves more than smart companies. Critical factors:

Equity—

A new premium is on regions that are open and friendly to all classes and races, combined with fair, shared access to opportunity. Research by Manuel Pastor and Chris Benner shows that more equitable cities grow faster—whether the breakdown is by race, by income or center city poverty contrasted to levels of poverty in suburbs. This relation between equity and growth also seems to be stronger in slow-growing or declining regions than in fast growing ones, which suggests that a focus on equity is not simply a luxury limited to more prosperous regions but perhaps a critical component to jump-starting growth in down economies.

One regional route to equity is building and rebuilding Public infrastructure in a way that connects workers to jobs, increases business efficiency, and revitalizes distressed neighborhoods. An example: community workforce agreements that let Los Angeles public works, schools and community college districts create more than 30,000 jobs for low-income neighborhood residents in building and rebuilding city schools, community colleges, and other infrastructure.

In the Minneapolis Saint Paul region, a \$1 billion light rail project includes three stations in especially poor neighborhoods, linking residents to job opportunities and enlivening prospects for businesses of color. The Kansas City region, acting through its Mid-America Regional Council, took funding from the 2009 federal stimulus fund package and focused it on a newly dubbed “Green Impact Zone,” a 150-block area of the inner city long plagued by poverty, violence, abandonment and joblessness. The goal: nothing less than turning around every negative indicator in an area that’s long been a glaring exception to the Kansas City region’s general prosperity—notwithstanding its proximity to major roads and a major health sciences cluster. Top agenda items ran from weatherizing every home that needs it to a bus rapid transit system, community policing, and a home-by-home outreach effort that included job training and placement.

Infrastructure should connect workers to jobs, increase business efficiency, revitalize distressed neighborhoods.

REASON 5: *But Business Means More Than Business*

Long-term collaborative regional alliances—efforts to share understanding of issues among diverse constituencies—appear to yield significant benefits, according to the Banner and Pastor research. In Jacksonville, Florida, for example, a highly effective and long-lasting community council has been working since the early 1970s, creating collaborative community processes to determine public policy responses to the region’s social and economic challenges, and helping to weave together a shared sense of regional destiny.

In Nashville, it’s a business-catalyzed leadership development program that has been working since the early 1970s to develop cross-constituency civic leadership with deliberate efforts to bring growth and equity perspectives together in long-range collaborative learning processes. Such initiatives seem to suggest it’s not just what you know, but who you know it with that makes a difference. In our contemporary world of segmented television news markets, filtered social media networks, and seemingly intractable political conflicts between the major political parties, more efforts to rebuild our collaborative civic infrastructure at this regional scale seem especially important.



Air and water quality
are key to competitiveness



Quality of place

In today’s economy, dull development patterns—from tired streetscapes to roadways of cookie-cutter franchises—are serious downers, especially in employee recruitment. The premium, instead, is on livability: attractive open spaces, inviting streets, well-kept parks, enticing cultural and entertainment facilities. All are increasingly seen as keys to retaining high talent and to drawing footloose young professionals to settle in, seek employment, start enterprises in a region.

Air and water quality are key to competitiveness as well. Regions leading on lowered greenhouse gas emissions—for example New York, Seattle and Chicago—are also positioning themselves for more secure futures.

Chattanooga, dubbed America’s most “heavily polluted” city in 1969 by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, provides a prime example of environmental resilience leading to economic transformation. Through the work of both public and private sectors, the Chattanooga region implemented voluntary emission reduction measures to meet all EPA targets before 2008. Civic action led to handsome development of the city’s Tennessee River waterfront. Billions of dollars of investment flowed to the region, both in tourism and through such victories as landing Volkswagen AG’s first U.S. manufacturing facility.

Infrastructure

Most American regions have serious infrastructure deficiencies, ranging from decayed roads and parks to waterfronts, plus antiquated water supply and discharge systems. But efforts to fix and upgrade are not only tickets against future decay and emergencies: they signal a region on the top of its game, reliable and a good target for investments.

Imagine a New York City that hadn't cleaned up its subways, a Washington, D.C., without its Metro, or a Portland without its quality network of light rail and streetcars. Timely, smart investment does matter.



Timely, smart investment
does matter.



Reason 6

States Moving from Paternalism to Partnership

The history of state recognition and empowerment of metro regions is mediocre at best. But there are encouraging recent signs related directly to metropolitan economic development—a new model to work on.

A shift is long overdue. Constitutionally, state governments hold all the legal cards; in fact many of their constitutions don't recognize the existence of cities, much less metro areas. Rationally, 21st century state governments would prize metro regions as immense economic assets, the “cash cows” that fill state coffers and subsidize rural areas. They'd be well-advised, like smart corporations dealing with subsidiaries, to give regions autonomy and demand performance. Instead, the states have routinely left metro regions fragmented into thousands of local units—cities, townships, villages, boroughs (a 50 state total of roughly 39,000). Some states allow inter-local agreements, but few encourage them.

State governments have often defined major sub-state regions, but rarely granted them much autonomy. There have been exceptions. Minnesota and Oregon authorized the creation, respectively, of the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities area and the Metro Portland regional government. Indiana allowed the creation of “Unigov” for the Indianapolis region. Jackson, Nashville and Louisville have all achieved, with state consent, a degree of metro-wide governance. State governments, through interstate agreement in 1921, formed the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the agency that builds and operates the critical bridges, tunnels, and airports of the New York City region. Interstate agreement in the Washington, D.C., region formed the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority, the agency that runs regional bus lines and the area's Metro rail system, second in size only to New York City's.

But such actions, compared to the hundreds of major metros in the U.S., remain the exceptions, not the rule. Just one example: the Charlotte region, which covers 14 counties in two states. Although there have been examples of regional cooperation—more than can be said for many other metros—the region is fragmented among a half-dozen regional transportation planning agencies and three regional councils of government. That lack of structural cohesion almost guarantees splintered and incoherent government decision-making. There's an

Many state constitutions don't recognize the existence of cities, much less metro areas.

REASON 6: States Moving from Paternalism to Partnership

active and assertive Charlotte Chamber and a truly regional body of business leaders in the Charlotte Regional Partnership. But no one asks them to weigh in on regional quality-of-life issues, and there are few connecting points between business and governmental organizations. That no consensus has been built, no plan designed for the entire region's land use or transportation, comes as no surprise. Meanwhile, growth, staggered but not stopped by the 2008 financial meltdown, continues.

In the words of Lavea Brachman, executive director of the Greater Ohio Policy Center: "State laws, regulations and policies establish the rules for what cities can and cannot do and set the stage for how and where development occurs." And all too often, they've "stacked the deck against central cities" by "perpetuating fragmented local governance, encouraging cities to compete with cities for business and economic development"—in effect "incentivizing greenfield development over the reuse of urban sites."

A 2012 report from the American Assembly, "Rebuilding America's Legacy Cities," suggests a turnaround: to give center cities, especially areas around the economic anchors of universities and medical complexes, strong preference in state funding for transportation, sewer and water facilities. The report also recommends making local city-suburb government mergers much easier, and encouraging regional revolving loan funds for infrastructure and development projects.

Sometimes states simply quash valuable initiatives "bubbling up" from their cities and regions. A prime example: the refusal of the New York State government, in 2008, to permit implementation of a New York City-designed system of congestion pricing to follow London, Singapore and Stockholm examples through fees imposed on vehicles in downtown streets during business hours. The intent was to relieve some of the excruciatingly slow city traffic, estimated to cost 50,000 jobs and \$13 billion in lost annual productivity, not to mention the unbooked cost of damage to air quality.

The revenue from the fees was to upgrade the city's clogged massive public transit system. The effort was a key part of PlaNYC, the city's advanced sustainability program for the 21st century. But the proposal required State Legislature approval and slammed into a wall of opposition from suburban and outer borough residents driving into the city—and was compounded by Albany politics. Result: America's lead city, a top global competitor, was denied the right to make a basic decision to enhance its environment, economy, and quality of life.

Sometimes states
simply quash valuable
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REASON 6: States Moving from Paternalism to Partnership

But there's no question that today's national and global economic challenges set the stage for a shift in state government policies from indifference and opposition to leadership. Better and more economical performance by local governments is becoming a pressing state need. Smart states would take action to incentivize, spell out legal and acceptable ways, for regional groups of local governments to merge (or closely collaborate) services ranging from public safety to accounting, waste disposal to economic development. And to simplify, to rationalize local government procurement rules in the process.

New information technologies, enabling networking, coordinated operations and heightened efficiencies, could be brought applied, along with more robust and relevant data systems. Often today's 20- and 30-somethings are asking: Why aren't we using up-to-date information technology to pinpoint concentrations of jobs, of poverty, across entire regions, and then build corrective strategies around them?

A first dramatic recognition of the policy performance potential of regions was provided by California when it decided, some years ago, to allocate the lion's share of its federal transportation funding directly to its regions (MPOs) rather than leaving the funding decisions to the discretion of the state Department of Transportation. Then, in 2008, a landmark California measure (SB 375) tied state transportation money to regional smart growth plans to cut back on vehicle emissions, requiring that regions direct dollars toward infill locations and transit-oriented development projects.

States can also provide direct service as regional coordinators. In Maryland, for example, the state Department of Transportation is providing strong support—supplementing efforts of the Greater Baltimore Committee and local council of governments—to construct a four-county regional transit system linking such facilities as the Baltimore-Washington International Airport, the Johns Hopkins Hospital complex, and upper regions of suburban Baltimore County. The state is also the lead force and official applicant for federal funding for a proposed Washington area Metro line to connect Montgomery and Prince Georges County.

The Colorado initiative, devised under Gov. John Hickenlooper in 2011, engaged citizen-business groups in all the state's counties, then focused in 14 regions covering the state, in a “bottom-up” (rather than the familiar “top-down”) process to design a statewide economic growth plan. Industry clusters, alignment of local and regional infrastructure, and paths to engaging industries were all included.

Why aren't we using up-to-date information technology to pinpoint concentrations of jobs, of poverty, across entire regions, and then build corrective strategies around them?

REASON 6: States Moving from Paternalism to Partnership

In New York, Gov. Andrew Cuomo designated 10 regional economic development councils covering the state. Each was co-chaired by a business and academic community person. This was a deliberate break with what Cuomo called the “one-size-fits-all” approach of the past. The regions, in a competitive process to win a larger share of a \$200 million pool of funds, were encouraged to identify and develop their own unique strengths to foster growth. Each was asked to work with a diverse mix of regional leaders from major local industries, small businesses, higher education, community organizations, and labor. And Cuomo frankly told regions such as Western New York, anchored by Buffalo, that it was time for them to lay aside internal rivalries and “parochialism” to produce their unified economic development plans.

To significant degree, Cuomo’s message clearly caught on. The region surrounding Albany was not a winner of the top funds. But Shirley Ann Jackson, president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and a local co-chair, said “This is a tremendous start in our effort to nurture a Capital Region economic ecosystem that is locally collaborative, globally competitive, and economically vibrant... a process that has brought focus to the extraordinary assets, resources and potential in the region.”

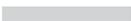
Likewise, in Tennessee, Gov. Bill Haslam created a “Jobs4TN” plan aiming to unleash entrepreneurial emerges and align state resources to support regional initiatives. Part of the plan was to establish regional “jobs base camps” to support coordination and fund a regional business accelerator in each.

And most recently, recession-blasted Nevada embraced “bottom up” strategies in a new state plan for economic development that positions the state as a catalyst—and supporter--of regional initiatives.

The significance of the Colorado, New York, Tennessee and Nevada initiatives: State leaders of diverse political stripe are starting to recognize that their economies need to be built from the base of effective regional economies. It’s fresh and overdue insight in many states where politics has often forced investment in the economy of rural areas which have far fewer supporting resources.



States from
New York to Colorado
have taken steps to make
regions responsible and
important partners
in their overall
economic strategies.



Reason 7

A New Federal Role

As regions across the nation work to invent their own agendas for sustainable growth and economic competitiveness, is there a rationale for strong federal assistance? The answer would seem to be “yes.” The federal government has a direct interest in creating a competitive economy, which in turn requires strong infrastructure systems, reduced social disparities, a well-educated populace. And there’s no question that federal investments in a broad array of areas, among them economic growth, air quality, public health, agriculture, education, workforce development and housing, will be stronger and more effective, if they are aligned with the investments made in localities and regions.

Strong new interest in a federal role in regions was inaugurated by the Obama administration in its Partnership for Sustainable Communities. Encouraged and endorsed by the White House Domestic Policy Council, the three official players were Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Key personnel from the three agencies began to meet not just occasionally but every week to mesh their policies and approaches—a virtually unprecedented interdepartmental partnership.

Two major funding initiatives emerged. One was the Sustainable Communities program, a HUD award program challenging local areas to overcome the “silo” impact of isolated policies in such areas as land use, transportation, workforce and economic development, and infrastructure investments. The program mandated nothing but did challenge regional communities to show they could merge programs and agendas for cumulatively higher quality results, taking risks that would be difficult without federal support and working toward more sustainable futures. Local governments engaged with chambers of commerce and economic development corporations in the applications. Two competitive rounds were held before Congress (in a mid-2011 economy move) cut off future funding. The last round, with \$96 million available for awards, prompted eight times as many applicants as awardees.

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*Reason 7 continues on page 24.
See sidebar on page 23.*

MPOs—Awakening the ‘Sleeping Giants’ Can Washington’s top regional program be improved?

Beyond the perimeter of policy pundits and government insiders, few would even recognize what MPOs mean. A question about them would surely sink a Jeopardy contestant on television. But for decades, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) have represented a significant mechanism to receive and make decisions on federal Highway Trust Fund monies flowing to their regions. Their decisions have major impact on what happens in regions.

Since MPOs are already positioned for impact, why not make their mission explicitly comprehensive? Why not make them responsible for how transportation and land use connect? And why not use transit to expand choices in travel and create incentives for high-density land uses?

In setting up the system in 1973, the congressional intent was to have the individual regions’ MPOs, including “principal local elected officials,” create three-to-five year transportation improvement plans (TIPs) for both roads and public transit. In the early years the intent was subverted by state highway departments unwilling to cede power to the regions. Exceptions were the regions of Portland and Minneapolis Saint Paul, both forming strong regional government organizations with clear land use powers.

That status quo held until 1993, when progressive planners, mass transit advocates, historic preservation supporters, rails-to-trails advocates and others mobilized a new national lobby – the Surface Transportation Policy Project. Its goal: to lobby for federal policy supporting state and local transportation broadly, not just auto and truck traffic, and to make the environment (including the recently-passed Clean Air Act) an integral part of transportation funding. New York’s Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan championed their cause and was instrumental in writing and passing the new “ISTEA”—Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991. Doubling the prior MPO funding, the law required the agencies to consider such alternatives to new highways as repair of decaying roads, installation of new rail lines or bus ways, measures to reduce air pollution, and alterations to make it easier and safer to bicycle or walk.

But ISTEA (and successor federal transportation bills) have failed to match the vision the sponsors had in mind. CitiStates Associate Bill Hudnut, the former long-time

mayor of the Indianapolis, suggests that the MPOs be called “sleeping giants.” The reason, in his words: “They can propose, but not dispose, can veto federally funded projects allocated under state plans, but not rewrite them. So they have few if any teeth.”

Those few teeth, however, take a big bite on regional policy as they reinforce the fragmentation of investment in transportation infrastructure. Today more than 381 MPOs operate under varying structures and differing degrees of clout and planning authority. Staff capacity and expertise vary widely, as does typical MPO interest in truly planning for all transportation modes (as opposed to divvying up road-building money). And despite legislative language to the contrary, many are not truly regional. Several regions have multiple MPOs. In no way can any one of them represent the full regional interest. It’s a problem that Congress could (but hasn’t) fixed by requiring that their borders to conform to those of the federal government’s defined Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs).

In an ideal world, regional councils of government would be the lead conveners and policy leaders in their areas. The councils in fact were the one-stop location to review federal grants under the so-called A-95 review process from 1969 until 1982. But President Ronald Reagan discontinued the process by executive order. As a result, MPOs today are often “the only game in town,” even if many if not most are faulted for failing to play a stronger leadership role. MPOs also represent a significant amount of sunk capital—and regional knowledge—that would be sorely missed if they disappeared. Current congressional proposals to withdraw funding for almost two-thirds of MPOs would remove the last regional body of significance in high numbers of metro regions—a very serious loss.

Conversely, MPOs encouraged or required by law to expand their vision might play a significant role in pushing for elements of higher density development, more-walkable neighborhoods, expanded transit, farmland preservation, and other carbon-emission-reducing policies. Some critics also suggest they change their composition to require proportional voting by members (rather than one-vote-a-government, regardless of population). It’s also been suggested they be popularly elected.

Reason 7 continues on page 24.

REASON 7: A New Federal Role

Reason 7 continued from page 22.

Meanwhile, the DOT managed a series of highly competitive “TIGER” grants for local transportation projects. A significant number were regional grants, designed both for sustainability and high economic impact. They represented a form of federal transportation assistance dramatically different from the essentially formulaic nature of monies flowing to regions for allocation by MPOs (see *box, p. 23.*)

The interesting economic rationale that lay behind the HUD and DOT efforts was research showing that the average American family is obliged to spend some 52 cents of every dollar just for housing and transportation, short-shrifting every other need such as food, and clothing, and education. The Sustainable Communities programs were said to be a way to push the figure down by helping workers and families gain easier, more affordable access to jobs and schools. A clear regional approach was cited: to help communities pivot away from yesterday’s preference for larger homes at lower prices but at farther distances. Instead the embrace was of such development strategies as housing closer to work centers, homes closer to schools, and transit services available to help households spend less on car travel. The strategy also embodied an effort to focus on supplying more compact, efficiently located housing units to accommodate the aging American family of shrinking size.



Since MPOs
are already positioned
for impact, why not
make their mission
explicitly comprehensive?



Reason 8

All About Outcomes

A macro look at organizational charts in regions reveals a warren of small municipal borders to councils and commissions, special purpose authorities, and counties enveloping other jurisdictions. Each has its own policies and perceived limits. It can be a thicket, a maze with no exit in sight.

By contrast, the regions whose people and businesses are moving forward effectively are those that see themselves as a whole. And they talk the language of “results.” They are serious about data systems to track progress. They are as concerned about outcomes as process—whether it’s moving forward a major infrastructure project, developing a selected economic sector, improving workforce readiness, crafting a robust economic strategy.

Under this common language, coalitions can be built. Networks of people and organizations can be formed and aligned with goals. Resources get used more effectively. Assignments to get the work done get made and timetables get set. People feel—and are—more accountable to get results.

Regions, organized for results, are set to be the critical platform for meeting the formidable challenges of this century. Regions’ borders and legal powers may be hazy. But pragmatically, they constitute the “real cities” of an urbanized century. And they represent a logical scale to draw together the most concerned players, from economic strategists to utilities to universities and trade schools, in forging strategies that fit both the economy and the geography.

“Upper” governments—the federal and state governments—may well stimulate regions to define their own versions of approaches to critical problems, mobilizing to produce results.

But many of the regional strategies named here, among them the Alameda Corridor, the federal Sustainable Communities program, and regional business plans and state efforts to stimulate their creation, speak to the effectiveness of defining clear outcomes. They take the politics of individual hobby-horse projects off the table and instead focus on how to get region-wide results. They oblige political leaders to respond to regional priorities, to bargain on those terms. For the 21st century, they represent a powerful impetus toward outcome-based strategies—from the grassroots up.

Regions, organized for results, are set to be the critical platform for meeting the formidable challenges of this century.

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October 26-28, 2011

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Resources

Commentary from Symposium Participants

[Smart Regions Will Listen To Approaching Hoof Beats](#)

William Stafford

[New Cluster-Focused Models for Regional Growth and Collaboration](#)

William H. Hudnut III

[Confessions of a Messy Regionalist](#)

Bill Barnes

[Studying Regionalism on a Palatial Estate](#)

Ian Scott

[Regionalism: Wonky but Real](#)

Mary Newsom

[Federal Leadership in Sustainable Development — It Is Important](#)

David Warm

[The Jig is Up: Unless We 'Change the Rules of the Game'](#)

Mark Pisano

[Eight Offerings From the Academic Stacks](#)

Kathryn A. Foster

[Cities, Metros Respond to a New Global Economy](#)

Neal Peirce

Regionally-based Economic Initiatives

[Collaborate: Leading Regional Innovation Clusters](#), from the Council on Competitiveness, 2010.

[Strategies for Globally Competitive Cities: Local Roles in Foreign Direct Investment and International Trade](#), from the National League of Cities.

[Sustainable Economies and Strong Communities: Regional chamber Strategies for Growth](#), from the Alliance for Regional Stewardship.