

Regarding Metropolitan Governance

My thoughts about regional governance of our metropolitan area have been shaped by both my reading of Myron Orfield's 1986 book on the topic, "Metropolitix" and by my service for the past four years as the non-motorized representative on the Met Council's Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) (first as an alternate, and since 2022 as the primary seat-holder).

I am persuaded of the value of regional planning & governance and have long perceived the potential of the Metropolitan Council. Yet, as currently instantiated, it is not delivering on its potential in many ways. Making the Met Council an elected body *might* partially ameliorate this, but only if done in a way that leads to a Council with truly regional convictions, without conflicting jurisdictional loyalties to cities or counties, and has the agency to act on those convictions.

A truly effective regional council would enforce growth boundaries, focus development densely vs. in a sprawling manner, create effective public transit, provide adequate & equitably distributed low-income housing, and prevent the otherwise ubiquitous problem of suburbs and exurbs free-riding in a way that concentrates social needs and dysfunctions and other costs on the core cities. All these things would be in the best interests of the region. That doesn't mean accomplishing these goals would be without winners and losers.

My service on TAB has provided both interactions with and observations of a variety of our local elected representatives. From these experiences, my sense is that plenty of planning and governance decisions may best be made at a *municipal* level, but that there are plenty that would best be made at a *regional* level. Yet it is often the counties that hold the greatest power over many planning and governance decisions. Yet, simply stated, the counties do not always act in the best interests of the region. So it is often county governance that seems to be a problem in many ways when it comes to planning of our transportation and transit systems, and I can see how this is likely also the case with sewer and water management, and parks and open spaces - all areas over which Met Council is supposed to have authority.

This leads me to believe that a "council of governments" model, in which the Met Council would just be a composite of sitting County Commissioners, for instance, would be one of the worst ideas. As would be setting up an elected body that had boundaries that just mapped onto existing County boundaries. In some ways, the TAB itself has many of these unfortunate features.

One way to encourage a Met Council with a truly regional orientation and adequate agency would be to draw jurisdictional lines in a way that accomplished proportional population representation and that would cut across multiple counties, creating competing constituencies with them. By helping Council members see and understand where they have common cause, this structure could help foster the sort of coalition-building Orfield identified so many years ago as an important feature of an effective regional Council. A further change that might be beneficial on this front would be if a greater separation of powers could be created between the counties and the Council with respect to planning and governance of our transportation, sewer, and transit systems, with the Council having primary jurisdiction over those functions. I have little hope that such a change will be entertained, however.

Finally, in order to attract the best leaders to an elected Met Council, these positions would also need to be full-time, and pay a "competitive" wage.

Thank you for your service on the task force, and for the opportunity to offer my thoughts.

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