

9-1-1997

Eastward Ho: Issues and Options in Regional Development for the Metropolitan Boston Region

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Recommended Citation

Wood, Robert C.; Ghirardini, Laura C.; Prew, Lori L.; and Kelley, Aundrea, "Eastward Ho: Issues and Options in Regional Development for the Metropolitan Boston Region" (1997). *John M. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies Publications*. Paper 22.

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The John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs

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An Occasional Paper

EASTWARD HO:

**ISSUES AND OPTIONS IN REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT FOR THE
METROPOLITAN BOSTON REGION**

By
Robert C. Wood

With
Laura C. Ghirardini
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September 1997

\$5.00 per copy

University of Massachusetts Boston

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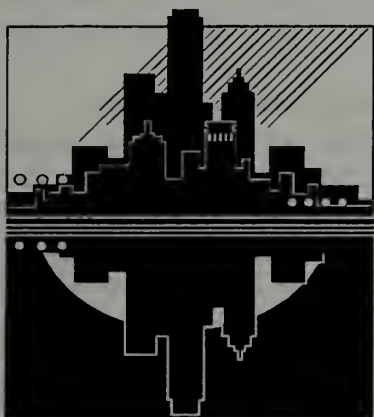
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FOREWORD

Mayor Thomas Menino of Boston served as a catalyst for the current dialogue on regional cooperation by filing legislation in 1994 to explore intermunicipal cooperative opportunities in the Greater Boston area. The law, enacted in 1995, established a Commission on intermunicipal cooperation for the Greater Boston Area charged with encouraging regional and cooperative approaches, and improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of local government services. Policy initiatives based on the recommendations of Commission members are expected to be applicable in other areas of the Commonwealth. The final report of the Regionalization Commission was issued in July, 1997.

Henry Richmond of the National Growth Leadership Project, James Brown of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, and Robert Solow of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology provided national data for this report, as did William Constable, David C. Soule, Edward Bates, and Jean Christensen of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. Kevin Harrington of Issues Management, Ian Menzies of the *Patriot Ledger*, and Mark Gelgund of Boston College further enriched the study. Special thanks to Rachael Chioino of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council Institute for helping on "number crunching." Robert Woodbury and Richard Hogarty of the McCormack Institute have been remarkably patient and supportive. State Representative Douglas Petersen, State Representative Barbara Gray, and Anita Lauricella of the City of Boston deserve the thanks of all of us for their work on behalf of regional initiatives for metropolitan Boston.

Robert C. Wood
September, 1997

THE AUTHOR

Robert C. Wood was appointed as visiting fellow at the John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs in 1994, after a long and distinguished career in education and government. A nationally known authority on urban affairs, Dr. Wood has served as president of the University of Massachusetts, Undersecretary and later Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Chairman of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, and Boston's Superintendent of Schools. He was a long-time member of the political science faculty at M.I.T., and held the Henry Luce Professorship at Wesleyan University for 10 years. He is the author of *1400 Governments*, a pioneering study of regional planning, *Suburbia*, *The Necessary Majority*, *Remedial Law*, *Whatever Possessed the President*, and many articles and essays on government and urban affairs.

With

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Lori L. Prew, who is legislative coordinator for the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and a participant in the subcommittee on regionalism chaired by State Representative Douglas Petersen (D-Marblehead). She has worked with State Representative Barbara Gray (D-Framingham) on comprehensive growth planning legislation, and is the author of a 1996 case study, "Planning, Services, or Policy? Perspectives on Regionalism in Metropolitan Boston."

Aundrea Kelley, who is a doctoral candidate at the McCormack Institute of Public Affairs and a staff member at the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Conventional wisdom suggests that the basic job of public policy studies (and public institutions, for that matter) is to deal in a timely and practical fashion with pressing public issues of the day. The focus typically is on 'ripe' topics, 'hot' political problems. If a study can be ahead of the curve, in John Kingdon's apt phrase "an idea whose time has come," so much the better. But unlike more traditional academic research, where the focus is timeless—*i.e.*, an explanation of previously inexplicable phenomena, *timeliness* is a prime reason for initiating a policy study.

In this context, analyzing the prospects for regional governance in Massachusetts and New England and suggesting the creation of any new arrangement for metropolitan regions for the Commonwealth seems premature or, at best, wishful thinking. But these are not conventional times. Wrenching changes in welfare, education, and health care are accelerating in a nation being demographically transformed.

Three important forces are at work which suggest that regional government may be a timely topic after all. First, as we will describe, the academic community is giving some priority to the subject after two generations of neglect. Second, in a time of budgetary constraints, the economic development strategies of metropolitan communities increasingly require a global perspective that emphasizes the interdependence of central city and surrounding suburbs in achieving and maintaining an international competitive advantage. Especially in Massachusetts, given the effects of Proposition 2½ and pressures on the costs of land and home ownership, the need to develop and articulate a common metropolitan economic strategy grows. Third, political forces speak increasingly to the ineffectiveness of local governments in coping with the critical issues of the day. In the midst of "the Big Dig" and a long-term inability to site a new convention center and a stadium within the metropolitan Boston region, how to plan and provide key metropolitan infrastructure is definitely a 'hot' political issue.

What We Are Talking About?

The focus of this analysis is on the concept of regionalism—perhaps best and most simply described as the act of cooperating with one's neighbors for a common good. Specifically, for Greater Boston, the 'neighbors' consist of the 101 cities and towns.

The definition covers a variety of forms of collaboration at a number of levels of government. It ranges from voluntary agreements to share services at the local level to formal international treaties aimed at achieving a regional perspective on security (NATO) or trade (the European Community).

At rock bottom, regionalism implies a recognition of interdependence by and among public bodies as they try to further the economic interests or the quality of life of their citizens and residents.

At the metropolitan level, regionalism focuses on the relationship between the central city or cities and the surrounding suburbs which are typically locked together by a common infrastructure and economy but separated by long-established political jurisdictions. At the state level, the pressures for building common competitive strategies for growth in the world community argue for a common New England approach to enhancing the region's edge in research, education, job skills, and quality of life.

The basic building block, however, is the metropolitan area. Henry Cisneros, Housing and Urban Development Secretary from 1993-1996, has pointed out that most of the economic strength of the United States rests in its metropolitan regions. In 1990, 75 percent of the U.S. population lived in metropolitan areas, and over 83 percent of the nation's income was derived from these same areas.¹ Accordingly, he suggests, a policy of shunning the inner city moves inexorably to damage its suburbs, and the nation as a whole.

Prosperous suburban areas usually do not experience income growth without improvement in central city incomes, nor do cities usually grow without prosperous suburbs. If individual communities do not perceive themselves as part of a larger whole, they are at a competitive disadvantage compared with metropolitan regions that have discovered ways to work collectively. Regions across the country are competing in an increasingly global economy to maintain and attract a talented workforce in emerging industries.

In striving to preserve their autonomy, Massachusetts' local governments are opting for ideology over these new realities. By and large, they do not associate with the city of Boston or with neighboring cities and towns in joint problem-solving, nor are they interested in developing problem-solving techniques for jurisdictions outside of their own. The Greater Boston Economic Study Committee (GBESC) in 1957 offered perhaps the last real regionwide perspective. Mark Gelfand, a scholar specializing in intergovernmental governance, recently noted,

"The Boston metropolitan area remains more an artificial statistical and cartographic construct than a popularly perceived economic, social, and political entity. This is revealed in both the organization of state government, and the outlook of private groups. Neither the executive nor legislative branches are set up to look at metropolitan issues in a comprehensive way. Committees of the General Court are arranged along functional lines and, while they may on occasion propose metropolitan solutions to problems, their tendency is to concern themselves with statewide matters."²

¹ Henry Cisneros, *Interwoven Destinies: Cities and the Nation*. (W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 274.

² Donald N. Rothblatt, Andrew Sancton, editors, *American/Canadian Metropolitan Intergovernmental Governance Perspectives*, (Berkeley: University of California Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 1993), 23.

If regional development is potentially so significant, why has it failed to catch on in metropolitan Boston and its neighboring communities? How might a regional consciousness now be advanced? This review undertakes to answer these key questions by looking at:

- the history of regional development on federal, state, and local levels;*
- current regional initiatives occurring nationally;*
- the demographic and economic profile of metropolitan Boston;*
- current obstacles to regional progress in metropolitan Boston, and*
- future prospects for the region.*

AN EMERGING NATIONAL AGENDA

Until this decade, recurrent proposals to adjust the distribution of powers in the American federal system and recognize the potential of regionalism have faced political gridlock. The 1966 Housing and Urban Development Act was the last major national initiative to encourage local and state governments to cooperatively plan and implement a regional public policy. One result of this initiative was the propagation of regional “councils of governments” or “COGs” on a national scale.³ Under the legislation, COGs were authorized to review and comment on federal grant applications from state and local units. Thus encouraged, their number multiplied tenfold between 1960 and 1980, peaking in the latter year at 660. When the Reagan Administration shifted this review authority to the states, thirteen COGs went out of business and many more became moribund.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, regional initiatives shifted to the private sector, especially to what might be termed “national development entrepreneurs.” According to Neal Peirce, a widely published journalist interested in regionalism, the development of large scale “edge city” communities by private entrepreneurs resulted in a “governance gap.” Regional public policy retrogressed, especially in New England. Grassroots and ‘state rights’ ideologies marked the political climate. Issues such as the high costs of urban living and the export of jobs and households were set aside. A public sector or mixed sector model for metropolitan regional development seemed increasingly unrealistic.

³ “Councils of governments” are regional bodies, typically comprised of local elected officials, that are charged with promoting intergovernmental cooperation and encouraging a regional perspective.

In the past few years, however, potentially powerful counterforces have begun to stir:

- In 1995, the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) began publication of a quarterly journal entitled "The Regionalist." The journal features work that "illuminates regional concepts and approaches across the social, physical, and economic sectors of metropolitan and rural America."
- Honoring Victor Jones, a pioneer in metropolitan studies, the Berkeley Institute of Government Studies declared in 1996 that "metro governance. . . returns to the political research agenda."
- The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which has approximately 3,000 fellows and 500 foreign honorary members, has convened, with other civic partners, a dialogue on the state of America's cities. Entitled "The Metropolis Project," the initiative focuses on Chicago.
- The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, under the leadership of James Brown, has placed major emphasis on the wasteful consequences of the way land is now being developed in the U.S.
- Henry R. Richmond, Director of the National Growth Management Leadership Project and a key architect of Portland, Oregon's metropolitan land management legislation, is putting together a new national organization, the American Land Institute. The Institute will support "regional and local development patterns that achieve national goals pertaining to economic strength, equal opportunity, and environmental quality." The project is based on Richmond's National Growth Management Leadership Project.
- At a 1995 working conference of some 50 urban scholars and practitioners convened by Secretary Henry Cisneros, former National Security Advisor Walter Rostow emphatically affirmed the nation's stake in "the urban problem": "When I am asked how I would rate the urban problem on the agenda of national security problems, I reply 'It is our number one national security problem.' If we succeed in mastering the current urban problem of our country, we shall strengthen our hand on the world scene. We shall demonstrate that we can be a truly multi-racial society which is at the same time true to the international ideals to which we as a nation have long been committed. . . .[I]f we fail. . . we shall be unable to play our part at the critical margin. And we shall risk a world environment of chaos."

These policy-oriented stirrings buttress and build on recent substantial scholarly inquiries, such as Samuel Beer's *To Make A Nation* (1993); David B. Walker's *The Rebirth of American Federalism* (1995); Anthony Downs' *New Visions of Metropolitan America* (1994), and David Rusk's *Cities without Suburbs* (1993). These and other academic studies fill the wells of public policy. They suggest that the gridlock may be dissolving, and that edge cities—a term that Joel Garreau invented only six years ago—may be losing out economically and socially.

IS THERE AN AGENDA FOR MASSACHUSETTS AND THE NEW ENGLAND REGION?

Notwithstanding some impressive leadership initiatives by national organizations and substantial progress in the country's southern and western metropolitan regions, Massachusetts and the New England region continue to lag behind. The Commonwealth has forfeited a century of initiatives in regional development—principally devoted to infrastructure investment in essential community facilities—by reverting to localism. The region currently has only one entity with authority of an interstate nature: the New England Board of Higher Education. Other collaborative enterprises—the New England Governors Conference and the Congressional coalition—are only voluntary. Clearly absent are coherent and coordinated planning instruments focused on economic development in the context of international markets.

The pressure for new regional awareness is growing in an era of tight budgets and sharp public disaffection with local government. Federal aid to local governments in Massachusetts was severely cut between fiscal years 1980 and 1990. Over the same period, federal aid to state governments decreased by almost 10% in inflation-adjusted dollars.⁴ In 1997 the prospects for continued federal cutbacks may finally force Massachusetts communities to reassess their policies.

Not only are state and local governments expected to cover costs with less federal support, but citizens are demanding that governments at all levels become more efficient. One way citizens have demanded efficiency is by fierce resistance to tax increases. Proposition 2½, which was adopted in 1980,⁵ followed by a year California's famed Proposition 13. During the "Massachusetts Miracle" in the 1980s, it seemed feasible for the state to provide additional support to local government programs without raising taxes. With the boom of the 1980s over, the state has curtailed local aid with the exception of an increase for educational reform. The increased responsibility placed on local governments boxed in by property tax limits underscores the necessity for Massachusetts to change direction in regional affairs.

The historical 'crazy quilt' of local units—with their duplication of schools, police, fire, and other services coupled with the ravaging of land by commercial development—may be losing its appeal. It is very expensive and taxpayers don't like that. Accordingly, it seems time to review the bidding as far as the Boston metropolis and the New England region are concerned. Our regional counterparts in California, Oregon, and Washington have made real progress. So far, when it comes to preparing for the new world economy, the wind blows from the West.

⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce, Government Finances, 1989-1990 and 1979-1980.

⁵ A statewide referendum in 1980 limited property tax hikes to 2.5% per year.

BOSTON METROPOLITAN HISTORY: From Fast Track to Breakdown Lane

What has made the sustained stalemate particularly frustrating to regional analysts in Massachusetts and New England is that it followed an early history of impressive progress. Metropolitan institutions had been created that carried out important and even essential public functions. At the beginning of the twentieth century and despite its reputation for “thorny independence,” the Commonwealth pioneered.

Boston’s first metropolitan effort took place in 1875 when an elite and predominantly Yankee citizens’ group petitioned the city council to reserve space for a large park or several smaller parks within the city limits in order to “preserve public health and morality in an era ravaged by industrialization.” The city hired the famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead who, in company with Charles Eliot and Sylvester Baxter, began the inspired quest for a “Green Emerald Necklace” metropolitan park system incorporating more than 2,000 acres of land that would connect the newly annexed portions of the city.⁶ The working class, increasingly of immigrant origin, supported both the parks and the jobs their construction and maintenance would create—especially since street cars made both more accessible.

In 1889, the legislature created the Metropolitan Sewerage Commission to conduct and maintain a comprehensive waste water disposal system for Boston and seventeen other cities and towns. Within the next decade, the Metropolitan Park Commission involving Boston and thirty-five communities introduced a regional perspective on how best to protect forest preserves, beaches and scenic corridors, which were no respecters of local boundaries.⁷ The creation of the Metropolitan Water Board followed, embracing Boston and twelve other communities. In 1898, the State Board of Railroad Commissions received significant new authority to issue franchises for connecting lines despite objections by affected localities.

The momentum of these nineteenth century metropolitan institutions, each with a specific mission, carried forward into the first half of the twentieth century. According to Lawrence Kennedy, the “metropolitan solution” was attractive to a broad spectrum of people at the turn of the century. Some believed that Boston alone was incapable of handling municipal growth adequately. Others alleged wasteful spending following the annexations of West Roxbury, Dorchester, Brighton, Roxbury, and Charlestown. Still others supported the metropolitan solution because Boston was now

⁶ Lawrence Kennedy, *Planning a City Upon a Hill: Boston Since 1630* (Amherst, University of Mass Press, 1992), 89.

⁷ Final Report and Recommendations of the Green Ribbon Commission, “Enhancing the Future of the Metropolitan Park System,” May, 1996.

coming under the control of the Irish-dominated Democratic party, and extending the metropolis would dilute their power base. In all probability, these factors reinforced each other. But the long dominant Yankee political base—which historically respected and supported the urban professional planning aristocracy and the 'science' of municipal management—was eroding.

With the decline of the oligarchy that had sustained a statewide perspective, the proposal for a Metropolitan Planning Commission was killed by legislators from the surrounding towns that would later evolve into—and be dubbed—suburbs or "suburbia."⁸ Labor support also waned. After Brookline defeated annexation to Boston in 1911, largely at the behest of its municipal employees, no further incorporations of neighboring towns were considered.

After World War I, however, the sewer, water, and planning commissions were combined in the Metropolitan District Commission, and a Metropolitan Transit District was created to bail out the privately-owned Boston Elevated Railroad. But increasingly, the emphasis in metropolitan cooperation was on providing particular services and facilities. As late as 1937, the New England Governors Conference was still discussing but not acting on the topic of "regional governing."

Seven years later, the "Boston Contest of 1944" was sponsored by the Governor, the mayor of Boston, and the presidents of Harvard and M.I.T., to generate regional interest in a post-war regeneration of the city—and, indirectly, to keep the Yankees in power as Boston's population became increasingly diverse. The contest winner was Harvard professor Carl Friedrich, whose plan called for metropolitan institutions to improve the political, economic, social and physical environment of the city and the surrounding towns. The plan was quickly shelved to gather dust in an era of growing Irish and Italian political muscle and a Yankee legislature now under siege. The cohesive political authority—which had maintained a metropolitan perspective and secured the support of social and intellectual elites as well as the working class—was falling apart.

After the Friedrich Plan, all regional initiatives were treated with suspicion. In 1946, Mayor James Curley proposed an assembly of 350 representatives of religious, educational, labor, and civic organizations to create a 50-year plan for the city. He added a plan for a federation of forty-three cities and towns, but neither plan was acceptable to the affected communities.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, metropolitan planning was sustained principally by the federal government through modest grants which supported metropolitan planning agencies under Section 701 of the 1954 Housing Act. Meanwhile, suburban resistance limited reform of the Metropolitan Transit Authority, and, in 1966, expanded the authority of local governments over budget and expenditure decisions.

⁸ Historically, an English reference to residential parts of a town about 1668 connoting inferior manners and licentious life. By 1896 "suburbia" was a quasi-proper name for settlements near London. The term was popularized in the U.S. in the 1950s.

It was not until 1969—when Mayor Kevin White called for an “Eastern Massachusetts Council of Governments”⁹ and the legislature created the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (a purely advisory body) that regionalism crept back on the public agenda in Massachusetts. A major federal/state collaborative effort followed in 1975 when HUD Secretary George Romney and Governor Francis Sargent appointed a metropolitan Task Force. The Task Force recommended a new “metropolitan entity” with representatives from key regional authorities as well as the cities and towns. The new entity would have the power to review development decisions of regional importance and could override regional authorities.¹⁰

Mayor White, now returned to City Hall, was a vocal opponent of the proposals, even though the Task Force had adopted major components of his 1969 plan. Members of the General Court were antagonistic or indifferent. In the apt phrase of former Senate President Kevin Harrington, legislative support for regional initiatives died quickly because there were “no trophies” for legislators to take home for their local constituencies.

In 1977, after the Sargent Task Force Report, a new commission on the “Effects of Growth Patterns on the Quality of Life in the Commonwealth” made a comprehensive set of recommendations. Called the “Wetmore Commission” for its chairman, Senator Robert Wetmore (D-Barre), the recommendations were intended to guarantee public oversight over large developments that would affect neighboring communities—but the planning process involving all levels of government was never put in place. Once again, the discussion of regionalism became largely an academic affair, including annual conferences sponsored by the new John W. McCormack Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

Meanwhile, based on its fragile 1966 authority and with federal funding, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) settled in to make a series of substantial studies and recommendations. These studies culminated in 1990 in the Metro Plan 2000, which was formally adopted by the 101 cities and towns. A concurrent effort was Blueprint 2000, an action plan initiated by Lt. Governor Evelyn Murphy which included initiatives in economic development, transportation, housing, environmental protection and planning. The Blueprint’s implementation, scheduled to begin

⁹ Mayor White’s plan called for regionalizing government in the Greater Boston area to allow for joint management and sharing of local costs and services. It proposed the creation of a 200-member General Council from 100 cities and towns to provide a forum for solving common problems, and for regional governing control over the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBA), Metropolitan District Commission (MDC), Massachusetts Port Authority, and Metropolitan Boston Air Pollution Control District. It also called for state takeover of the local costs of roads, veteran’s benefits, and county functions; a powerful 18-member advisory council, and a Greater Boston Regional Educational Service Center to provide services, programs, and materials to all school systems so as to even out fiscal disparities. Under the plan, planning staff would be provided through the existing Metropolitan Area Planning Council with new funds from a five-cent per capita assessment in member communities.

¹⁰ The Task Force Report proposed a metropolitan planning agency comprised of representatives of the cities and towns, and of existing regional agencies such as the Massachusetts Port Authority (MPA), Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and Metropolitan District Commission (MDC). Under the Task Force plan, the MPA, MBTA, and MDC would retain their identity but be under the umbrella of the metropolitan planning agency which would have the right to review and override their proposals.

in 1989, was stalled by the time demands and political fallout of Governor Michael Dukakis' Presidential campaign.

By 1990 a new regional actor, 1000 Friends of Massachusetts, mobilized around environmental issues and effectively promoted the benefits of regional planning to local economies. Regionalism began at least a temporary renaissance although the 1000 Friends became dormant. In 1994, the General Court set up a "Subcommittee on Regionalism" to consider regional alternatives for the Commonwealth. State Representative Barbara Gray proposed the "Massachusetts Planning and Development Act" the same year, which had a disappointing reception from the planning community. Two years later, Mayor Thomas Menino of Boston persuaded the legislature to establish and partially fund a Commission on intermunicipal cooperation to examine shared service delivery among and between Boston and its neighboring communities.

None of these recent ventures has called for a fundamental realignment of state and local governmental responsibility, or the creation of new types of metropolitan authority. In retrospect, the 1975 Task Force Reports—now twenty years old—represent the high water mark of such proposed realignments. As I noted at the time:¹¹

"Authorities have developed our port and air terminals, extended our highway and parkways, maintained mass transit, and assured our water supply. The next stage calls for two advances: a common policy for the existing authorities—the reconciliation of their plans, the reallocation of their resources—and a metropolitan approach to land use and housing. . . . There's not much use to holding power if it can't be used effectively."

Consequences: Authoritarian Government

While a genuine realignment of state and local powers to accommodate new regional responsibilities has been stalemated since World War II, the issues requiring a metropolitan perspective have not gone away. Instead, they have been diverted to other institutional and political arenas. The resolution of long festering issues in education, transportation and the environment has been sought through the judiciary, or through enhancing the use or powers of "authority" structures which have emerged as almost a fourth branch of government. Patterned after private corporations, these public agencies are authorized to raise revenue and spend it as if they were a government.

The intervention of the courts revolved initially around the national issue of desegregation. In Boston, it was invoked first in the school case where the Federal District Court, hamstrung by the 5-4 Supreme Court decision in 1972, was forced to make student assignments within the forty square miles of Boston proper— absolving the suburbs from responsibility. Court intervention on both federal and state levels expanded to deal with Boston public housing problems (again without suburban participation) followed by the cleanup of the Boston Harbor. In the last case, to fend off judicial takeover, the General Court created the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA),

¹¹ "Metro Government for Eastern Massachusetts?," *Boston Herald*, February 2, 1975.

representing Boston and thirty-seven communities and possessing its own rate-setting, bond-issuing and pay scale powers.

In the area of metropolitan transportation, the Central Artery Tunnel Project (known as “The Big Dig”) is a complex intergovernmental program dependent on federal financing—but actually carried out by an array of federal, state and local highway agencies. The project involves constructing the new Ted Williams Harbor Tunnel (now complete), removing the overhead express highway and replacing it by below surface roads, and extensive relocation of major underground installations and infrastructure. The largest public facilities investment currently underway in the United States, the “Dig’s” management is contracted out in part to private corporations. It will be completed some time in the next century at a cost now currently estimated at \$10.4 billion.

Thus, in the Central Artery Tunnel Project and the two authorities established after World War II (the Port Authority managing Logan Airport and the Turnpike Authority overseeing the major East-West expressway), the major choices shaping the future development of the region are in non-elected, non-democratic hands. Key decisions concerning education, housing, the harbor, and the urban environment are ultimately the responsibilities of the Court. The reconfiguration of transportation in metropolitan Boston is the responsibility of an executive coalition involving local and professional planners and administrators dependent in the end on Federal financing. With the additional constraint of the 1980 Proposition 2½ imposed on local tax options, and a corresponding shift to state financial support, the shape of the Boston future lies in essentially authoritarian hands.¹² Where the authorities lack legal jurisdiction (in the case of the location of the convention center and a new stadium), standoff and gridlock reappear. The issue of accountability—who’s in charge—intensifies.

In David Walker’s view, at least 51% of local governments across the nation (42,565 cities and towns) are “non-viable” given the size of their population. He includes “most” of the 351 Massachusetts cities and towns in his estimate although he did not identify them specifically. The ideology of grassroots democracy continues, and the contemporary commitment to privatization flourishes, but the reality is that the major power left to local governments today is to say “no” through their zoning and land use powers to new housing and development proposals. “Not in my back yard” is the phrase of the day. Pricing out an increasing number of minorities and immigrants is the practical consequence.

So, historically the public policy fashioned for Massachusetts by a coherent and powerful political elite with a regional perspective disappeared. It was replaced by a pluralistic, fragmented, unpredictable political process divided first by ethnicity and later by race, compounded by growing immigration and white middle class flight to the suburbs. The 101 existing local governments located in the Boston metropolitan region froze in place after World War II. When progress has been made since then, it has been in the context of existing regional authorities or carried out under the duress

¹²

For a more extensive analysis of judicial management cf. *Remedial Law: Where Courts Become Administrators*, Robert Wood, editor (Amherst, MA, University of Mass Press, 1993).

of court orders. Gridlock in terms of fixed local boundaries and a resort to federal and state regulation became the way of public life.

THE NATION CATCHES UP AND MOVES AHEAD

Although regional solutions to public policy disintegrated over time in metropolitan Boston, quite a different experience emerged in hundreds of metropolitan areas in the United States. Following post-war population shifts south and west, the first signs of significant structural reform came in the south. (The prototype was Canada's Toronto which has just achieved another expansion of its metropolitan boundaries.) In the United States, beginning in the 1950s, civic leaders, drawn largely from the business sector and appalled by the duplication of public functions and overlapping bureaucracies at the local level, launched a first wave of advocacy for metropolitan reform with the battle cry of "metro or bust." The reforms "busted" in St. Louis, Cleveland, Boston and Maine, but won in a city-county consolidation in Miami which was bursting at the seams with newcomers. "A jellyfish community," observers proclaimed scornfully, forecasting that Miami would not prove a national precedent since its politics were prey to any passing fad. (The consolidation has held, and the city is now calling for enhancing the powers of Dade County.)

In the 1960s, other Southern cities picked up new metro momentum. Significant city-county consolidations took place in Nashville (Davidson County), Jacksonville (Duval County), and, via annexation, Charlotte (Mecklenburg County). In 1995, a final annexation in Charlotte replaced the piecemeal process which had proceeded it.

Annexation has also been the favored regional strategy in the West, which, following Southern tradition, had strong county governments in place. Favored by liberal annexation laws, and unfettered by the Eastern legal and ideological commitment to town and municipal government, San Antonio, Indianapolis-Marian County, Lexington-Fayette County, and Anchorage-Anchorage Borough moved to create—in David Rusk's phrase—"elastic cities." While annexation is still relatively rare (twenty city-county consolidations have been approved at the polls and 100 have been voted down), the option of annexation together with strong county governments has placed the South and West in advantageous positions for regional development and marketing. The most advanced regional model is Portland, Oregon. Building on the precedent of a metropolitan service district and an elected board of local officials, Portland voters adopted a home rule charter in 1992 that included a directly elected regional government. Termed "Metro," the government has a specific charge to undertake comprehensive land use management and planning for three counties and twenty-four municipalities in greater Portland.

At the state level, policy initiatives are also underway. Frustrated by lack of progress at the local level, Florida, Maine, Hawaii, Vermont, Rhode Island, Georgia, Washington, and New Jersey have followed Oregon's lead in adopting a "growth management" strategy. These strategies seek to replace the largely defensive planning of local zoning and planning boards with comprehensive statewide planning and land use policies. They enable the state to review local plans and ordinances, and in the words of John DeGrove of Florida, "to ensure the Big 3C's—consistency, concurrence and competence—in land controls and regulation in metropolitan areas." The effectiveness of state growth management policies are yet to be demonstrated, but they may give the states what David Walker calls "authoritative ways of making sub-state regions in rural and metropolitan America."

Finally, there are strong signs of a Washington revival. After a decade marked by misfeasance, malfeasance and non-feasance, a decade when the principal activity of HUD appeared to be rewarding private developers with ill-conceived and often fraudulent subsidies, Secretary Henry Cisneros and his successor Andrew Cuomo have brought about a major departmental turnabout. In addition to protecting his budget, Secretary Cuomo has given high priority to spearheading metropolitan approaches to urban problems—a welcome return to the emphasis Robert Weaver began and George Romney continued.

THE SPRAWL GOES ON: Facing up to Demographic and Economic Realities

Can we jump start the long-dormant impulse toward regionalism in the Greater Boston area? If so, how?

The beginning of wisdom may be to recognize the compact geography of Massachusetts and New England compared to the rest of the country. Only six states are smaller than Massachusetts, and four of those are in New England. *Each* of the eleven states in the Far West is larger than the six New England states *combined*. Perhaps more important, county government in Massachusetts—though of ancient origin—has never served as a major local jurisdiction.

While these features are distinctive, Massachusetts conforms increasingly to the national demographic profile in terms of urban population and density, a profile that has been transformed over the past few decades.

Between 1950 and 1990, according to Henry Richmond, the population in metropolitan areas increased from 56% to 78% of the total U.S. headcount, with the 39 larger metropolitan areas accounting for 51% of the U.S. total. More dramatically, he shows the sharp decline in residential densities: the San Francisco region is moving from 8.2 units per acre in 1975 to 5.8 today.

Baltimore's experience is similar, from one-fifth to two-thirds of an acre per unit— a 350% change. For his metropolitan sample of large regions, Richmond reports that land area grew a factor four to eight times larger than population in most areas, further evidence that metropolitan densities are going down. And in Chicago, while the metropolitan population grew only 4% between 1970 and 1990, commercial land consumption increased by 46% and suburban commercial and industrial consumption rose by 74%.¹³ The documentation of sprawl is coupled with—and in part reflects—the spiraling cost of “urban” land, which is growing three times faster than the consumer price index and now accounts for more than one-quarter of the total cost of a housing unit.

These patterns are further complicated by the migration patterns of the last decade. Since 1980, the U.S. has experienced a tide of immigration that exceeds even the dramatic influx from 1900 to 1915. Immigration in the 1980s reached almost 10 million, and more than 10 million more immigrants, legal and illegal, are likely to arrive during the 1990s—in part as a result of the 1990 Immigration Act. Most of the immigrants who make up this latest wave come from Latin America and Asia,¹⁴ with a significant minority from the former Soviet countries. The new arrivals bring a new set of political and policy challenges for metropolitan regions in terms of employment, housing, schools, and health care.

In Massachusetts, the numbers have major consequences for the public sector. Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies, in its analysis of the 1990 census, showed that the state's population growth in the 1980s—just under 5%—was half the U.S. rate and the lowest in New England. The fastest growing cohorts were children under five (+22%) and adults over 65 (+13%). These cohorts are precisely the ones that place special pressures on schools and health care. Further, net immigration during the 1980s for non-whites and Hispanics increased 104% compared with an overall .3% population decline. Black non-Hispanics were up 29% during the decade, while Hispanics, Asians, and Pacific Islanders were up 190%.

So, cities and towns face increased demands for public services—education, job training, health care—while public resources bump against the Proposition 2½. The disparity between needs and resources is intensified. This disparity—expressed in terms of per capita income and equalized property tax rates—is shown on Table I for the 10 poorest and 10 richest communities in Massachusetts.

¹³

Richmond figures were confirmed by the HUD study of October, 1996 of 114 of America's largest metropolitan regions. The study emphasized emerging new “clusters” driven by technology and service growth.

¹⁴ Michael Fix and Jeffrey Passel, “Immigration and Immigrants: Setting the Record Straight,” *Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies*, 19-21.

Table I - Individual Disparities between Poorest and Wealthiest Communities, 1990

	<u>Population</u>	<u>Education Level (Percent with Bachelor's Degree)</u>	<u>Per Capita Income</u>	<u>Families Below the Poverty Level</u>	<u>Tax Burden (Equalized Tax Rate) Rate per \$1000 Assessed Value</u>
<i>State Average</i>		27.2%	\$17,224	6.7%	\$22.5
<u>Lowest 10</u>					
Chelsea	28,710	12.0%	\$11,559	22.9%	\$41.0
Lynn	81,245	14.3%	\$13,026	13.9%	\$28.0
Everett	35,701	11.3%	\$14,220	8.2%	\$27.4
Revere	43,786	12.3%	\$14,723	8.6%	\$29.5
Rockland	16,123	16.0%	\$15,060	6.3%	\$19.7
Somerville	76,210	30.9%	\$15,179	7.6%	\$25.9
Boston	574,283	30.0%	\$15,581	15.0%	\$37.0
Malden	53,884	20.1%	\$15,820	5.5%	\$26.8
Wrentham	9,006	27.8%	\$15,856	3.1%	\$19.9
Average - Lowest 10	93,383	19.4%	\$14,689	9.4%	\$27.7
<u>Highest 10</u>					
Weston	10,200	68.2%	\$46,855	1.6%	\$15.8
Sherborn	3,989	65.5%	\$41,614	1.0%	\$19.2
Dover	4,914	64.3%	\$40,288	0.4%	\$13.1
Carlisle	4,333	66.4%	\$36,387	1.0%	\$18.2
Lincoln	7,666	59.8%	\$35,169	1.1%	\$18.9
Wayland	11,867	59.0%	\$34,646	1.0%	\$22.4
Sudbury	14,358	63.3%	\$33,441	0.8%	\$18.6
Wellesley	26,615	68.5%	\$32,253	1.3%	\$13.9
Concord	17,076	55.9%	\$31,655	2.1%	\$14.5
Cohasset	7,075	54.6%	\$31,166	1.3%	\$18.9
Average - Highest 10	10,809	62.6%	\$36,347	1.2%	\$17.4

Note: 1990 Census Data, except tax rates which are for 1996. Tax rate average is for the Metropolitan Area communities. Equalized tax rate is calculated by dividing the tax levy by the tax base.

Source: *Massachusetts School District Profiles 1994*, Massachusetts Executive Office of Education, The Parent Information Center.

Not surprisingly, seven of the ten poorest communities are located in the MAPC-designated inner core subregion. Diversity among public school populations also differs dramatically by community income. In the ten wealthiest communities, school districts are 90% white. In the ten

poorest communities, they are 69% white. These figures compare to an average of 79.3% white among school districts statewide.¹⁵

Table I underscores particularly the tax burden carried by the poorest cities and towns, with the exception of Rockland, showing a special demographic configuration. It affirms again the continuation of inequities first identified in the 1975 Task Force Report.

However, the issue of equity remains, developing a cohesive metropolitan strategy for the deployment of households and jobs is much more than dividing the spoils among the urban core and the rich and less rich suburbs. It concerns the capacity of the Massachusetts regions—Boston, Springfield and Worcester—to compete in the rapidly developing global economy. As Seattle has learned the necessity of creating and maintaining a Pacific presence, so our regions need to give attention to the Atlantic Rim. To be an effective competitor means putting aside the domestic mercantilism that has pitted suburb against suburb, and suburb against central city for over half a century in the scramble for the “best” jobs and households.

Now in its place is a collaborative undertaking, which assumes the maximum use of labor, transportation installations, freight and economic capacities and sophisticated technology. The evidence suggests that comprehensive planning and shrewd local and capital venture decisions are the keys to a successful regional future. The potential of this new metropolitan style can be a powerful force in gaining international attention for Greater Boston and New England.

The destructive impact of localism—the dog-eat-dog consequences of provincial local zoning laws and housing codes—has been clear for at least twenty years. The 1975 Task Force Report documented conclusively the inequities in local services, needs, and tax capabilities among Greater Boston communities. Thirteen communities, for example, had a per capita tax base of less than \$5,000; thirty-two had a per capita tax base of more than \$39,000. The extreme example was Weston, which had slightly more than six times the equalized assessed value (or tax base) of Chelsea. (See Table II.) Given that warning, unheeded by the state and with no mechanism for regional attention, it is not surprising that Chelsea went bankrupt and belly-up by 1990, and was placed under state receivership.

¹⁵ Diversity figures are for the 1992-93 school year. Data are from *Massachusetts School District Profiles 1994*, Massachusetts Executive Office of Education, The Parent Information Center.

Table II - Equalized Assessed Value, 1972 and 1996

Poorest 10 Communities*	Equalized Assessed Value	
	1972 (\$000)	1996 (\$000)
Chelsea	\$2,970	\$28,572
Boston	\$3,289	\$51,550
Lynn	\$5,540	\$28,073
Revere	\$4,980	\$37,372
Everett	\$9,420	\$58,454
Somerville	\$3,720	\$35,232
Gloucester	\$6,590	\$66,228
Cambridge	\$5,180	\$73,172
Salem	\$6,410	\$51,439
Malden	\$4,350	\$36,858
Wealthiest 10 Communities*		
Winchester	\$9,740	\$102,929
Lexington	\$8,780	\$117,653
Wayland	\$9,290	\$109,579
Concord	\$11,520	\$131,331
Sudbury	\$11,480	\$118,387
Wellesley	\$11,410	\$127,401
Carlisle	\$9,750	\$120,915
Dover	\$14,570	\$179,649
Sherborn	\$13,300	\$133,151
Weston	\$18,400	\$190,821

*Based on 1970 Per Capita Income.

Sources: The Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation and the Governors Task Force on Metropolitan Development.

Twenty years after the Task Force Report, as Table I shows, seven of the same communities were still in the lowest ten in per capita income. The comparison between Weston and Chelsea remains startling for 1996, with Weston now having almost seven times the tax base of Chelsea, and the poorer communities have swung further below the Boston median since 1970, while the wealthier towns have grown even more prosperous. Trends show that instead of abating, the disparities among the 101 cities and towns are growing worse as reflected in terms of social needs, tax capabilities, average incomes, and employment changes.

The 1975 Task Force Report also outlined substantial fiscal disparities among communities growing out of local fiscal structures overly reliant on the property tax base. Massachusetts voters passed Proposition 2½ in 1980 in order to cap property tax rates, but the real effect has been more local reliance on state revenues. The 2½% cap favored wealthier communities whose tax rates were already lower than those in urban centers. While state aid was increased throughout the 1980s in an effort to offset the effect of the property tax limit, the property tax cap actually froze the disparities

between the rich and the poor communities, and equalized tax rates remain higher in the urban centers than in the suburbs.

Cities and wealthy suburbs differ significantly in their patterns of expenditures and revenues. Public expenditures as a percentage of average resident income are much lower in affluent suburbs than in central cities and towns. The city of Boston spends more per household than all but the wealthiest suburbs, despite having lower than average household incomes. These differences are clearly reflected (Table I) in a comparison of equalized tax rates, with the poorest towns carrying the heaviest burdens.

Over the past two decades, the Boston metropolitan area has shown a pattern of continued suburbanization. Most of the central cities, larger towns, and inner suburbs had no growth or actually lost residents, while towns and newer suburbs on the fringe continue to grow. Communities along Interstate 495 to the west, northwest, and particularly southwest of Boston grew considerably, although the total numbers involved were not large. Typically, this suburban ring has offered lower housing prices, more available land and expanding employment centers to attract families.

Some 80% of the region's cities and towns, however, lost population between 1980 and 1990. Notable exceptions include Rockport, a growing retirement community on the North Shore, and Chelsea, a densely settled urban core community with a growing concentration of recent immigrants from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Haiti. Population trends point to an increased need for services in the center cities and inner ring suburbs to offset the disparities exacerbated by growing sprawl. However, the reduced population in these communities is reflected in reduced public revenues available for services. And although suburban densities are on the rise, the numbers of new residents are not high, and many suburbs lack the critical mass required to support the service needs of a lower income population.

Employment has also suburbanized over the past two decades, as jobs continue to follow the residents out of the city center. Boston's share of total employment in the 101 metropolitan communities declined from 34% in 1967 to 25.9% in 1990, while the number of jobs increased rapidly in suburbs and towns located near intersections of major highways. Employment forecasts suggest that these trends will continue. Projections for the year 2000 and beyond show the wealthier suburbs with increased employment opportunities, while jobs in the inner city continue to decline.

In sum, the negative effects of fiscal inequities continue to intensify. Decreasing Federal aid puts growing pressure on local revenues and revenue-generating capacity. At the same time, service needs are increasing and communities with high service demands and low revenue-generating capacity are especially vulnerable. Middle and upper income households in the outer suburbs are affected as well, with a growing apprehension about the impact from the inner areas, an inability to maintain stable development patterns in the region, and an increased awareness of the tenuous suburban position in a region faced with growing disparities. The stratification in economic background, education budgets, and access to jobs and basic services dramatizes the need for a reform agenda.

OPTIONS

Planning, Service, Policy: Getting to Yes

It is in this context of substantial local inequities and new immigrant aspirations, joined to emerging global competition, that regionalism may best be examined. Three models of regionalism hold varying degrees of promise: (1) *the planning model* which encourages communities to work together toward coordinated land use planning; (2) *the service delivery model* which encourages communities to organize shared service delivery; and (3) *the policy model* which encourages decision-makers in neighboring communities to consult on areas of critical mutual concern.

Planning. Growth management of contiguous cities and towns is the primary focus of the planning model. In most states, responsibility for regulating land use has been delegated to local governments on the implicit assumption that they are highly cognizant of and responsive to the development needs and desires of their respective residents. This assumption ignores the reality that many land use decisions have larger-than-local ramifications. It also ignores the pattern of corruption in local governments that is often linked to these same—potentially value-enhancing—decisions.¹⁶ County government, especially in Massachusetts, has been under attack for instances of malfeasance in law enforcement and unaccounted deficits in hospital and other functions.

Recognizing local interdependence, as indicated earlier, nine states have passed state land-use planning and growth management legislation. Seven other states have established gubernatorial growth strategies commissions or have held conferences on developing growth management legislation. Such legislation allows professional regional planners to examine local road conditions, traffic management, water quality, solid waste management, open space protection, affordable housing support, and other concerns that cross local boundaries.

In comparison to these steps, the Commonwealth's progress on regional growth management is clearly modest. The two evident signs of progress are the Massachusetts Planning and Development Act (legislation filed by State Representative Barbara Gray in 1994 which is still in Committee); and Executive Order 385, a rather vague executive action signed by Governor William Weld in April, 1996, that asks all agencies in the Commonwealth to evaluate their current policies and plans to assure that they facilitate "sustainable economic development" and preserve environmental quality.

Political and financial considerations continue to thwart these and other moves toward coordinated growth management in Massachusetts. The Office of State Planning, which was

¹⁶ *Governance: The Magazine of States and Localities*, November, 1996.

established recently and then immediately abolished, signals the continuing reluctance to establish statewide oversight with regard to significant actions by the 351 cities and towns.

Service Delivery. In the service delivery model of regionalism, municipalities, counties, regional planning agencies, special purpose districts, housing authorities or other governmental entities band together to improve services and achieve savings. Seventeen different kinds of regional approaches to service delivery have been identified in Massachusetts.¹⁷ The six most significant are informal cooperation, interlocal service contracts, joint powers agreements, contracting, transfers of functions, and regional special use districts.

Informal cooperation—the most widely practiced form of regionalism—generally involves collaborative and reciprocal agreements between two local jurisdictions that are typically sealed with a handshake. Such agreements do not require state authorization, do not usually require fiscal actions, and only rarely involve matters of regional or even sub-regional significance. Informal cooperation is common in Massachusetts.

Interlocal service contracts are voluntary but formal agreements between two or more local governments that allow them to cooperate selectively for specific ends, primarily by sharing certain services or personnel, purchasing supplies or equipment, or addressing mutual resource protection problems.¹⁸ One of the more successful examples of such interlocal agreements is the Southeastern Regional Services Group (SERSG), founded by a consortium of eighteen communities to handle joint purchasing and personnel administration. SERSG's joint purchasing efforts recently saved the participating communities \$133,000 on the purchase of Department of Public Works services and supplies such as chip sealing, line painting, and sand for snow and ice removal.

While joint service contracts appeal to some communities for some services, they often face local opposition. For example, town residents may strongly support retaining their own fire station, even if the fire station in a neighboring town is almost abutting their own station. This support is buttressed by town employees and their unions who fear that pooling resources will eliminate jobs.

Joint powers agreements are arrangements by which two or more local governments agree to jointly plan, finance, and deliver a service for the citizens of all of the jurisdictions involved. State Representative Jay Kaufman (D-Lexington) filed legislation in the 1995-1996 legislative session to allow various public agencies to enter into joint powers agreements in order to better coordinate environmental and conservation plans. If the bill is successful, Representative Kaufman plans to expand its use into other areas.

Contracting by public entities with the private sector is another approach to regional service delivery. Governor Weld has popularized this approach in Massachusetts through his "privatization"

¹⁷ For additional information, see David Walker, *The Rebirth of Federalism* (Chatham House Publishers, Chatham, N.J. 1995).

¹⁸ Worcester Municipal Research Bureau, *Considering Regional Government for Worcester Part II: Proposals for Comprehensive Regional Governance*, Report No. 95-2, April 3, 1995.

campaigns—most recently the effort to privatize the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) bus service.

Transfer of functions occurs when the state opts to “down load” state services to regional entities, or municipalities choose to “up load” local services to regional entities. Such shifts are common nationally in larger metropolitan areas. They are more likely to involve transfers from municipalities first to counties, and then to regional councils or special districts.¹⁹ Transfer of functions is now being explored in Massachusetts by State Representative Douglas Petersen (D-Marblehead) in his Subcommittee on Regionalism.

Regional special use districts and authorities are established to cope on an areawide basis with a major urban service challenge such as mass transit, sewage disposal, water supply, hospitals, airports, or pollution control. They are increasingly popular both nationally and in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, and the Metropolitan District Commission are prime examples.

To date, the service delivery model of regionalism is the most popular—by far—in Massachusetts. For example, the Regional Planning Services Office of Franklin, Norfolk, and Wrentham allocates planning staff time to the three communities based on the interlocal agreement. In a joint recycling program between Newburyport and Amesbury, the communities hold title to recycling vehicles jointly, and the collection contract is advertised and bid individually.²⁰ Swampscott and Lynn have concluded a contract for joint dispatch services, and are now evaluating shared fire and ambulance services. The South Shore Coalition, a consortium which includes Marshfield and 10 neighboring communities, is investigating the possibility of creating a regional solid waste disposal site. The Massachusetts legislature has tinkered at the edges of this model with some modest contributions toward joint service delivery in the state.

Policy: The third general model of regionalism is the *policy* model, which creates or provides a “table” at which regional leaders convene to discuss issues of mutual concern. The Boston region does not now have key elements of the policy model of regionalism. The best way to describe what the policy model *is*, is to describe what the Boston metropolitan area *isn't*. Charles Royer, former mayor of Seattle, Washington, has compared that city to Boston:

Seattle area voters in 1992 created a new metropolitan government to manage transportation, water quality, and growth more effectively and democratically. Another new regional structure, the Trade Development Alliance of Greater Seattle, functions as a combined trade and foreign office for the region. Since 1982, the Mayor, business, media, civic leaders and elected officials from the Seattle region periodically have jumped on an airplane to visit one of their competitors and its customers in America, Europe, or Japan. All are driven by a growing regional cooperation and vision, and the realization that the economic destinies of suburb and central city of large metropolitan-

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 277.

²⁰ Mark Siegenthaler, “Regionalizing Local Services, A Status Report,” *Municipal Advocate*, 1994, 11.

centered economic regions are interwoven, requiring collaborative public planning and decision making. At the May, 1994, Boston Conference, I asked the question, 'Where do public and private leaders in the Boston region meet to talk about its economic future?' No one knew.²¹

Seattle is not the only metropolitan center to adopt the policy model. Other metropolitan areas have added a global perspective to regionalism. Nationally, regional councils or Councils of Governments ("COGs") have often filled the policy vacuum Royer identified. Regional councils adopted their "policy" role due to the high level of responsibility granted to them by the federal government over the past three decades.

Metropolitan Boston has lagged notably behind other regions. Although legislation was enacted in 1955 enabling contiguous communities to form regional planning districts with advisory powers, on their own accord, none of the area's cities and towns took advantage of the opportunity. Finally, in 1963, Greater Boston's regional council, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), was established—chiefly at the behest of its business and civic leaders.²²

The MAPC district originally consisted of forty-seven communities, but thirty-five more communities were added later through amendments to the council's enabling statute. An additional nineteen communities voluntarily joined the Council over the years, bringing the total to 101 cities and towns. In addition to representatives of these communities, MAPC has twenty-one gubernatorial appointees representing a variety of interested groups, including low income citizens, minorities, and consumers. Fourteen ex-officio members, representing eleven state agencies and three Boston agencies, bring the total membership to 136.

But, MAPC is only one of thirteen regional planning agencies in Massachusetts. Its capacity to look statewide and to pose statewide options from a common perspective is sharply constrained by the alternative strategies of its twelve counterparts that are focused on sub-areas outside of metropolitan Boston. Unlike similar councils in several other states which use them in a "policy" capacity to guide the decision-making for the region, MAPC is by statute advisory only. Thus, the Council and its staff are authorized only "to conduct research and prepare such reports as might be helpful or necessary to improve the physical, social, and economic conditions of the metropolitan district; to provide technical planning assistance to member communities; and prepare advisory comprehensive land use plans." Most of these plans are ignored and eventually become outdated because MAPC does not have the authority to effect their implementation.

²¹ Charles Royer, and Harvey Gant, "A Tale of Two Cities: Charlotte and Seattle." Speech presented at the Boston Conference, hosted by *The Boston Globe* and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology at the John F. Kennedy Library, in May, 1994.

²² Donald N. Rothblatt, Andrew Sancton, editors, *American/Canadian Metropolitan Intergovernmental Governance Perspectives* (Berkeley: University of California Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 1993), 45.

OUT OF THE WILD BLUE YONDER: Rediscovering or Abandoning Counties

The three models just reviewed contemplate no substantial structural changes. That is, they rely on the city and town as the basic building blocks for regional governance. There is, however, a more radical option: to either revive or eliminate the county.

Nationally, metropolitan reform has increasingly looked at counties as prime players. In Massachusetts and in most of New England, however, the county is seen as anachronistic, lacking the resources and authority to carry out the functions that it has been assigned. County services are criticized as duplicative, ineffective, and financially inept or corrupt. If, in fact, county government has outlived its usefulness, then abolishing it may be a cost effective contribution to a better polity.

A lesson in the consequences of such a move is at hand in Connecticut. Connecticut's counties once built roads, licensed taverns, ran the courts, and operated the jails. Paralleling Massachusetts, most of their duties were gradually taken over by the state. Eventually, counties were reduced to an administrative arm of government with no direct taxing power—non-self-supporting entities without a single function or activity over which they exercised exclusive authority.²³

Weakened in power and prestige, Connecticut's counties became vulnerable to attacks from various quarters, including traditional 'good government' groups and state commissions appointed to investigate governmental problems.²⁴ Governor Abraham Ribicoff led a sweeping reform movement in the 1950s to eliminate county governments that were viewed as corrupt and impotent, and were plagued with patronage, high costs and mismanaged services. The last vestiges of county governments were abolished by the Connecticut General Assembly in 1960. Relevant county functions were transferred to the state to avoid constitutional concerns about abolishing elected offices.

The elimination of counties in Connecticut left a void, however, and raised the issue of whether a new metropolitan entity was needed. Spearheaded in part by the rising interest of the Hartford business community, the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce authorized a \$50,000 study in 1964 of a possible metropolitan government for Hartford, and held a three-day "Town Meeting for Tomorrow" conference in November of that year to explore possible avenues of metropolitan development.²⁵ However, despite several similar efforts, the reluctance to relinquish local control thwarted efforts to find a substitute for counties through metropolitan governance. In the 1960s, a weak regional

²³ Rosalie Levinson, "County Government in Connecticut: Its History and Demise," 1966, 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁵ Rosalie Levinson, *op. cit.*, 190.

council, the Capitol Region Council of Governments, took over some of the core county functions. Its power, however, was purely advisory.

Counties exist in Connecticut today as mere geographic regions—a means of identification without governmental significance. Morton Tenzer, former director of University of Connecticut's Institute of Urban Research, observed that "[counties] disappeared and nobody missed them, because they really didn't do anything."

There is a renewed incentive, however, for interregional cooperation in states such as Connecticut because of the repercussions created by stark disparities between central cities and their surrounding suburbs. This is especially true in public education where regional approaches appear to be the only way to achieve financial equity as mandated by the Connecticut Constitution. In 1990, the courts intervened to initiate regional collaboration to improve education in the *Sheff v O'Neil* case. But despite a court order in 1995 mandating inter-community involvement, little has changed.²⁶

In Connecticut then, where there was a successful move to abandon counties with no adequate alternatives for fostering intergovernmental agreement, an important gap appears in regional decision-making which affects the courts as well as the other branches of government.²⁷

Today, Massachusetts county government faces many of the same problems which Connecticut saw almost forty years ago, and legislative actions continue to weaken county government by reducing their responsibilities and their ability to raise revenues.²⁸ The Court Reform Act of 1978, for example, diminished county government's level of responsibility regarding the county court system, and Proposition 2½ limited the property tax rate in municipalities. Since county government receives all funding through legislative appropriation, county government operates with no incentive to oversee costs on its own account.

The current fiscal dilemma alone provides a compelling reason to reexamine the structural framework of county government. Diminishing revenues combined with an increase in local prison incarceration rates have added substantially to the counties' burdens. Evidence of financial and administrative disarray is abundant in overcrowded prisons, decrepit courthouses, underutilized county hospitals, and county registries without the technology to communicate across town and county lines.

Ethical issues are an additional reason to reexamine county government, with the sheriffs' offices as the main focal point. Currently, the fourteen elected sheriffs in Massachusetts operate with a great deal of autonomy and no accountability under the civil service system. They are responsible for county correctional facilities and civil process service, but of late, they are better known as the focus of charges involving misuse of funds, abuse of power and corruption. According to Eric

²⁶ Draft Public Policy Paper Cape Cod Regional Government, December 1, 1995.

²⁷ Draft Public Policy Paper, Cape Cod Regional Government, December 1, 1995.

²⁸ Sandra Blanchette, "Grassroots Regionalism the Way of the Future? Where is it and What's Behind it." Unpublished case study, Master of Science in Public Affairs Program, University of Massachusetts Boston, May, 1995.

Turkington, House Chair of the Committee on Counties, "While the counties correctly argue that they have no control over the errant sheriffs, the public has inevitably associated county government to the sheriff's shortcomings."²⁹

Massachusetts sheriff offices have grown into relatively large entities, operating modern correctional facilities with budgets ranging from \$10,000,000 to \$40,000,000. This growth, ethical concerns, issues of accountability, and the chronic financial constraints of Massachusetts cities and towns have spurred a demand for genuine reform of county functions as they now exist.

Simply abolishing counties without providing another form of regional collaboration, however, could commit Massachusetts to the same problems that Connecticut has experienced. Much of the research on counties ignores or slights the important interrelationships between counties and local authorities. Counties provide a critical link between state and municipal governments, a link which may be a key to improved regional planning.³⁰ Proponents of county government contend that, with their existing mechanisms and regional design, counties can be augmented or transformed to meet both the current and future needs in the Commonwealth.³¹

"Regionalism: Moving Massachusetts into the 21st Century," a January 1994 state legislative white paper, suggests that counties could form the basis for implementing comprehensive regional government in Massachusetts. Reviewing alternatives for regional government, the paper points to counties as "an existing building block" for regional reform.

A number of counties already act in a limited way as regional bodies, with informal, interlocal agreements in the areas of planning and service delivery. Some Massachusetts counties have gone beyond their traditional roles to incorporate progressive changes that may be a model for other regions.

- ***The Cape Cod Commission:*** This Barnstable-based agency was established in 1991 to protect the region from the effects of unplanned growth. A Regional Policy Plan was developed with public participation covering areas of land use, natural resource protection, economic development, transportation, capital facilities, waste management, open space, energy, affordable housing and community character. The commission has the power to review any project with "regional impact" and is unique among Massachusetts RPAs in its planning regulatory power.³²
- ***Hampshire County:*** Hampshire County has a cooperative purchasing department with voluntary membership to pool resources and regionalize efforts.
- ***Essex County:*** Essex County Commissioners meet with officials from all of the counties, cities and towns to identify common areas of concern where a regional approach could be helpful.

²⁹ Eric Turkington, *The Boston Globe*, September 17, 1996.

³⁰ Brett Hawkins and Rebecca Hendrick, "Do County Government's Reinforce City Suburban Inequities? A Study of City and Suburban Service Applications?," *Social Science Quarterly*, December 1994, Vol. 75, 755.

³¹ Sandra Blanchette, *op. cit.*, 15.

³² "Considering Regional Governance for Worcester," April 15, 1995, 2.

- **Franklin County:** Franklin County is working with the Governor's Office to abolish itself and create a successor Council of Governments.³³ The County charter has been rewritten to phase out county government by the summer of 1997 and convert to a regional cooperative system.

While many municipalities currently use informal interlocal agreements to increase service efficiency, the same benefits could be provided more extensively and efficiently through some form of regional government. At the least, such a formal regional structure could help localities locate further opportunities for collaboration.³⁴

In brief, it seems clear that if counties are formally abolished, some new regional alternative is necessary to resolve effectively key metropolitan development issues and mediate local financial inequities. The most recent proposals for abolishing counties outright were made in January, 1997, by Governor Weld and Senator Richard Moore. The Moore plan is the more comprehensive and explicit about the role and authority of COGs. Both are attentive to filling the regional gap that the Connecticut reform created.

The present options are these:

(1) State take-over of core county functions

In a recent report on county government, former Worcester Senator Arthur Chase proposed that the Commonwealth assume responsibility for "necessary" county functions and that "wasteful" functions be abolished. The Chase report concluded that \$25 million could be saved in one fiscal year by transferring county courthouses, hospitals, jails and registries of deeds to the state. The Executive Office of Administration and Finance projects an overall savings of \$200 million to \$300 million in operating costs, repairs and new construction by having the state take over the corrections function now handled by the counties.

(2) Strengthen the role of Regional Planning Agencies

County governments and regional planning agencies have been operating side by side for more than thirty years. Currently, planning agency members are not elected and they are limited by their lack of authority to carry out the plans the agency develops. The demise of county government could open up the door for a stronger Council of Governments to facilitate cooperation among towns. This regional entity could either be voluntary (done in a way acceptable to the cities and towns) or mandatory, supported by taxes and fees for service. Should the present proposals for eliminating county government as we know it be successful, RPAs sit poised and eager to expand their role.

(3) Privatization

Contractor service agreements could replace services now provided by counties. Potential candidates for "privatization" include management and maintenance of county courthouses, registries of

³³ Paul Shew, "History of Barnstable County," May 17, 1996.

³⁴ "Considering Regional Government for Worcester," *Worcester Report of Regional Governance*, April 3, 1995, 2.

deeds, county hospitals and agricultural schools, as well as operations related to correctional facilities, such as health care and food service.³⁵

* * *

Clearly, some feasible choices lie ahead in the reformulation of an appropriate counterpart capability for governing bodies other than counties and 1997 is by all odds the year for this idea to find its way on to the state's agenda.

CONCLUSION: Four Stipulations and Four Options

Given the foregoing data and analysis, one can reasonably make four stipulations and identify four options with respect to the desirability and feasibility of regionalism in Massachusetts.³⁶

STIPULATION 1:

The evidence is clear, as Alan Altshuler and Anthony Downs have shown, that the "value conflict" between disparate ideologies—one stressing community and egalitarian impulses and the other emphasizing individualistic and marketplace outcomes—still powerfully favors the individual operating in the private sector. This is especially true of land use decisions.

"For better or worse," Altshuler concludes, "the overwhelming trend of the 1990s at all levels of government is toward greater market deference rather than more vigorous public action to achieve redistributive objectives."³⁷ Downs adds "Americans have long made decisions—about both their individual consumption of housing and transportation and about candidates for state and public office—that emphasize personal independence."³⁸ Accordingly, local governments in the United States exercise greater land use authority than in any other advanced democracy. In a direct showdown, localism wins.

³⁵ Executive Office for Administration and Finance, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, "Is there a Future for County Government,?" November, 1992.

³⁶ The analysis of the prospects for New England regionalism, which involves issues of interstate compacts and the six separate state constitutions, is an important corollary to this review of Massachusetts regionalism. It is, however, a separate research and policy undertaking.

³⁷ Alan Altshuler, "The Ideologies of Urban Land Use Politics," *Landlines*, Vol. 8, No. 6, November 1996.

³⁸ Anthony Downs, "Sprawl or . . . What?," *Landlines*, Vol. 7, No. 2, March, 1995.

STIPULATION 2:

The commitment to localism, especially in the Commonwealth, creates unnecessary costs for local governments (a redundancy evident in our earlier calculations) and increases unnecessarily the cost of land. As long as 101 separate local governments control zoning and building codes, public authority is overwhelmingly defensive, as captured by the axiom, "Not In My Back Yard." As long as the real property tax is a chief source of revenues and based on improvement value rather than land value, the preference given to residential development ensures a long term pattern of increasing inequities among localities. In effect, land values are subsidized and improvement values are penalized.

The Lincoln Land Institute's summary of expense/revenue ratios for Massachusetts towns shows that "on a strictly financial basis, the cost of providing public services is more than twice as high for residential development (\$1.09) as for commercial development (\$0.56) or open space (\$0.44)."³⁹ The duplication of bedrock services (fire, police, schools, subsidized housing) produces a continuing disparity of local revenue capacity and service requirements among the region's grassroots governments. The 1975 Task Force analysis reviewed twenty years later makes clear that the Weston/Chelsea "gap" continues, exaggerated by the impact of Proposition 2½.

When the federal tax breaks associated with land acquisition and property investment are calculated to the benefit of development entrepreneurs, then the load on local property taxes is compounded. Nationally organized entrepreneurs are encouraged to invest in local suburban residential markets because of federal tax write offs. Mortgage write-offs and mortgage interest deductions are the most obvious subsidy. Developers of low to moderate income housing have had major tax breaks available since the 1968 Federal Housing and Urban Development Act. Those in turn increase local expenditures in the areas in which the housing is developed. Other costs are externalized—roads, water, sewers, environmental pollution. The cumulative effect can be measured by continuing disparities in regional income, projected employment prospects, and local service requirements vs. tax ability.

STIPULATION 3:

The failure to empower either state or regional oversight for land use planning provides land use options that fuel private speculation. It further ensures that—absent effective urban growth boundary management such as Portland, Oregon pioneered—the public sector can't recapture the values public investment makes possible. So localism has encouraged and continues to encourage an increase in land costs that makes "the American Dream" of home ownership for the middle-income family increasingly impractical and dependent on larger mortgage liabilities. In one generation, land costs (as distinct from the "envelope costs" of construction and associated financing) have grown from 25% of the average homeowner mortgage to more than 33%.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, *Landlines*, Vol. 7, March, 1995.

In Massachusetts since 1990, the figures tilt even more toward the profits secured by the speculators. So long as property values are for the large part locally established and local zoning strategy is based on the “everyone for himself/herself” calculation of domestic mercantilism, land values increase substantially. But the external costs as covered by the states also expand—and inner city and inner suburb communities are increasingly isolated and abandoned.

STIPULATION 4:

Localism and deference to the market mechanism combine to make more difficult a regional economic development strategy. A focus on jobs and a faltering economy was a powerful energizer in the 1992 Presidential campaign. As we have seen, it was also a potent force for reform in metropolitan Seattle and Portland. If we are to secure and maintain a global competitive advantage, a similar regional perspective and drive need to be mobilized by public and private collaboration arrangements in a way not seen for Greater Boston since the 1957 Greater Boston Economic Study Committee. That Committee, headed by James McCormick of M.I.T., sparked major innovations in transit reorganization and downtown economic revival. This approach needs to be revisited and reviewed as presented in the summary in detail.⁴⁰

Conceding both the potency of grassroots democracy and the ideology it imposes in distorting land values and the allocation of public service costs, Downes has identified three alternative development patterns (Table III, p. 31). They underscore the difference between the metropolitan oversight now exercised in western Europe and the continuing American preference for the mildest of restraint so far as low-density growth is concerned. If our objective for Massachusetts regionalism is to encourage Alternative #1 as a first step, then the national strategy emerging over the past decade seems far ahead in concept and execution than that of the Commonwealth.

⁴⁰GBESC: A Report on Downtown Boston, May, 1957 (privately printed).

Table III: Alternative Development Patterns

	Growth Management	Residential Pattern	Transportation	New Job Location	Form of Governance	Affordable Housing
Dominant Vision: Unlimited Low-Density Growth	Markets allocate housing and jobs in accord with local zoning and building codes	Owner occupied, single family detached homes	Private automobiles	Low-rise workplaces	Small communities with strong local governments	Zoning for social homogeneity; housing trickles down to lower income groups
Alternative #1: Limited Spread, Mixed-Density Growth	Semi-permeable urban growth boundary	Clusters of high-density housing amid larger areas of low-density housing	Transit use encouraged	Voluntary concentration of jobs in designated nodes	Local autonomy or limited local land use planning within state-mandated frameworks	Lower regulatory barriers; some housing subsidies
Alternative #2: New communities and Greenbelts	Growth boundaries for designated corridors; new towns and metro area	Similar to #1, but with housing outside urban boundary clustered in relatively high-density new communities	Emphasis on mass transit	Regulation and incentives help to concentrate jobs in new centers	Local comprehensive planning within state mandated frameworks	Much as for #1, with lower regulatory barriers and some subsidies
Alternative #3: Bounded High-Density Growth	Strongly enforced growth boundary and job location planning, with both housing and transit subsidies	Almost all growth occurs as densification of urban core	Heavy reliance on mass transit	Regulations force new jobs into urban core	Areawide governance or regional government	Restricted supply of developable land keeps prices high but subsidies are a low-income entitlement

OPTION 1: COUNTY REFORM

As noted earlier, the nation's chosen instrument for metropolitan reform is the county—a key governing building block that can help consolidate local units via annexation and fashion a local federalism that accommodates some autonomy. This is for now unacceptable in Massachusetts. Political sentiment runs contrary, and the current geographical boundaries—drawn centuries ago to assure access by horseback to county courthouses in half a day—no longer make sense. Our counties are simply too small. Furthermore, the shabby record of county sheriffs probably dooms any prospects of reinvigorating the county as a viable unit, with two or three possible exceptions. In the Cape or Franklin County, for example, common issues of environment and land management draw localities toward consensus. With the nation's preferred instrument for metropolitan reform being unsuited to this state's political and geographic circumstances, what other options are there?

OPTION 2: METROPOLITAN ENTITIES

In retrospect, the 1975 Task Force recommendation for a regional body with selective powers for development planning and infrastructure review, weighted by population and drawing on local representative government, ran against prevailing political tides at both the state and local level. It still does today, at least in Boston and other Eastern metropolitan regions. The General Court remains principally a suburban body with the central cities of Boston, Worcester and Springfield barely constituting a respectable minority. Where a state perspective is introduced, it is at the gubernatorial level, and executive branch turf fights among departments and agencies are more relevant than regional concerns within those same entities.

It is possible, of course, to persuade citizens who are politically inclined and economically well situated to actively support a new regional politics separate from both local and state elections. Informally, this kind of detente occurred with the Boston College seminars of the 1950s and subsequently with the work of GBESC. Here influence directly exercised on elected officials produced major reforms in transportation, economic development, and central city investment policy. But a new governing structure resembling what Oregon, North Carolina and Florida have recently put in place seems implausible.

OPTION 3: REVIVING THE COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

This option has promise when considered in the context of public disillusionment with counties. The recent establishment of the Franklin Council of Governments (in effect replacing the Franklin Council Commission) and a similar proposal now pending in Worcester County suggest that COGs can rise again. As they do, it is important to review the national record of these bodies in the 1970s to identify their strengths and weaknesses and how—within the often obsolete county boundary lines—they can function effectively especially in planning and investing decisions.⁴¹

⁴¹ Donald E. Norris, "Killing a COG," *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1994.

OPTION 4: CIVILIZING THE AUTHORITIES

An option with even more immediate promise is to change the autocratic character of the major authorities: the Turnpike, Logan, and Harbor development. Investment costs for those quasi-private organizations are currently \$1.56 billion each year. Yet, their oversight remains that of the Governor and his appointees and their resources come increasingly from the federal government or more precisely the political influence that the Massachusetts Congressional delegation can muster. As the recent Turnpike “air rights” development proposal shows, the Mayor of Boston can be blind-sided by key proposals in which the Mayor was not included. As the Patriots stadium controversy makes clear, unilateral decisions by the Turnpike Authority can be countermanded only at the Federal level within the intervention of Congress.

One way to introduce democratic dimensions into these essentially unaccountable enterprises is to join them with the participatory arrangements that advisory bodies and community based organizations have evolved over the last twenty-five years. In both instances, the mediation and consultation process has changed previous arbitrary decision-making.

Most recently, MPAC has initiated and is bringing to successful conclusion the restructuring of the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization for planning and programing financial resources for a multi-model transportation system. For the first time, the MPO added the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, the City of Boston, and six municipalities. Sub-regions are authorized to nominate other cities and towns for representation. So, in a somewhat covert way, metropolitan perspectives and community views may come to influence what has been an engineering-driven set of programs with fundamental impact on the physiography and culture of the region. That case, however, has yet to be made.

OPTION 5: ENGAGING THE GENERAL COURT

One persistent obstacle to making effective governing arrangements on a regional basis in Massachusetts has been the opposition or indifference of the General Court. This barrier is a function of the comparatively small size of the state and the comparative strength of the legislature. Strong legislative leadership up to the present time via-a-vis executive and judicial authority has been insufficiently recognized and insufficiently courted. Further, individual senators and representatives are accustomed to responding to requests from local constituents about local problems. Often enough, they are not disposed to refer these problems to local officials for resolution.

These legislative characteristics need to be explicitly recognized, and special provisions must be made for continuing legislative involvement in regional public policy issues. As conveners in bringing together local officials to address regional issues and as overseers of regional affairs, the key actors in the 101 MAPC communities could and should be those elected or appointed by the Speaker and Senate President to the General Court. The relevant legislative officers ought to have explicit entitlement to give leadership in metropolitan development. A first step could be establishing a Joint Commission paralleling the Willis-Harrington Commission of the 1960s which provided the breakthrough laws creating the present system of public higher education. The summary elaborates on this option.

OPTION 6: REINFORCING THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Throughout the '80s, the potential for renewed national leadership still existed at HUD. But the department—treated with indifference and then neglect by the Reagan Administration—endured a steady stream of charges of misfeasance and malfeasance reaching to the immediate office of the Secretary. A return to probity occurred under President Bush with the appointment of Secretary Kemp, but White House indifference to urban affairs continued.

In the Clinton Administration, the leadership first of Secretary Cisneros and now Secretary Cuomo have reinvigorated HUD's sense of mission and its defense of the resources necessary to begin national efforts to restore the 114 largest metropolitan regions. In October 1996, HUD unveiled a report on metropolitan economic strategy, emphasizing the emergence of eighteen new industrial clusters in which collaboration between central cities and their suburbs is critical. Buttressing the early advocacy of Charles Royer of Seattle, the federal metropolitan strategy expands and reinforces Secretary Cisneros' earlier emphasis on regional cooperation and the building of regional consciousness of a common community. In 1995, HUD survived Congressional efforts to decimate if not destroy the Department. The prospects for a targeted and efficient program of federal assistance are stronger now than they have been for almost a generation.

Summary

In retrospect, the 1975 Task Force called it right as far as its predictions of emerging regional trends were concerned. But the Task Force called it wrong in prescription. Its recommendation for a metropolitan “entity” of 101 members—drawn from local officials and weighted by population—resonated principally in the state's private sector where the Boston Vault was still an influence. It was dead on arrival at the State House.

In projecting economic and social trends, the Task Force twenty-two years later has proven prescient. Social and economic disparities among the region’s communities have continued if not increased. As we have seen, inequities in the location of jobs and households so far as taxpaying capacity is concerned have widened. Access to affordable housing for moderate and low income families has fallen sharply. The real capacity of local government to play “destiny” politics, to shape the quality of residents' lives, has dwindled away except for the defensive zoning tactics of the well-to-do. Even there, local property levies have risen to bump against Proposition 2½ constraints. Overall, the Task Force did a good job of anticipating the future.

In terms of a realistic prescription, however, the Task Force missed the target. Grassroots ideology blinded suburban citizens to the increasing unnecessary costs they were carrying—in local taxes and transportation time, accentuated by the separation of job and household. Indeed the Task Force never undertook to estimate the potential savings of consolidating essential police, fire and health services. They remained hidden charges showing up only on local tax bills.

So no compelling political pressure for a metropolitan “entity” appeared. Absent that, there was little reason for the General Court to devolve power and authority to another level of government that could massage again decisions with regard to transportation, the environment, and economic development.

At a time of political transition from the Sargent to the Dukakis administrations, the 1975 Task Force misread three factors fundamental to effective Boston metropolitan reform:

- Its emphasis was political and local, not economic and regional.
- It failed to acknowledge the key factor in the metropolitan development—the capacity to compete in a global economy.
- It did not acknowledge that the key player was the state legislature—not an assembly of localities.

Constrained by size and history, to try to build metropolitan entity from the ground up and restrict it to the Boston metropolitan area was a mistake. It ran against the grain of truly ancient tradition. The 101 communities involved were too many, too old, to set in their ways to find common dialogue easy and too diverse to see easily a contemporary common cause. A look at the map for MAPC—from South Shore to north Chelsea to Dover to Gloucester to Quincy—makes clear the disparities. Asking these communities to dialogue with one another to seek consensus, as each decade made clear the rapidly expanding numbers and diversity of new immigrants, was—to put it mildly—unrealistic. To expect them to formulate a competitive global economic strategy was fantasy.

The situation is compounded by the thirteen other regional planning agencies. None embraces a genuine region; they are really adjacent local jurisdictions. The members may be more manageable than MAPC, but their capacity to have a real impact on issues of significance for their future is indeed limited.

If sticking to localism signals ineffectiveness and impotence as far as rational metropolitan development is concerned, ignoring the role of the legislature was the worst Task Force mistake. The Task Force recommendations failed to recognize the explicit authority of the state government to establish the two great competitors of regionalism: the authorities, and the potential for court intervention due to inactions or failures of the local governments.

So—in a state too small to have genuine regions, too old to forget the 351 memorial services on the 4th of July sanctifying the Revolution, too clever at hiding its budgetary shortfalls under the sleight of hand of state cherry sheets—a generation has slipped by without purposeful, accountable and constructive regional policy. In the 1970s, the Boston public schools and the Boston Housing Authority—key public institutions—went into judicial receivership. The threat of judicial actions sparked the Boston harbor cleanup. Imaginative and farsighted bureaucratic strategy at the state and Federal level, aided and abetted by the powerful Massachusetts Congressional delegation, made the Federal largess of the “Big Dig” possible. But nowhere in this process was a regional comprehensive perspective employed. As has been noted, key decisions were postponed, shunted aside or redefined as engineering issues.

Perhaps the best example of yet another standoff is the question of a new stadium for the promising Patriot football program. Setting aside the misperceptions of Governor, Mayor, owner and local community, the decisive figure was Congressman Joseph Moakley. Increasingly the question “Who’s in charge?” appears. Clearly the metropolitan perspective of a political elite like the one that began the Emerald Necklace is gone. Pluralism—ethnic, class and cultural—continues to increase. Our economic potential on a national and international scale stands at the wings, whether the discussion concerns a convention hall, a really effective housing program, or a rapidly improving school system. But none is front and center.

“It’s the Economy, Stupid”

A New Prescription

If the diagnosis of Greater Boston’s malady is correct—a region too small and awkward in its boundaries, a heritage too ancient and too well remembered, politics too parochial to acknowledge the real costs carried in obsolescence and missed decisions—then what should the region do? For openers, three strategies commend themselves:

- a direct and sustained engagement of the General Court, along the lines of the Willis-Harrington Commission, which provided the opportunity to build a public higher education system of quality;
- a restructuring of existing regional planning agencies; or/and

- a new Greater Boston Economic Study Committee (involving new business and civic leaders) focused directly on assuring that the Boston metropolitan region is a major player in the global economic game.

The Willis-Harrington Commission consisted of seven state representatives, three senators and eleven distinguished citizens from business, schools and colleges.⁴² The 624-page Commission report and 67-page summary identified the major shortfalls in the state's educational systems then and focused on the reorganization and strengthening of statewide boards for schools (K-12) and public higher education. Although school desegregation issues moved to the center stage, looking back now it's my perception that the impact of the Willis-Harrington Commission exceeded that of any of the one hundred or so reform efforts that preceded or followed it.⁴³

A comparable legislative commission with members from key districts facing stubborn urban problems could provide an authoritative and continuing focus on the policy issues long unresolved and critical to regional development, especially in the Boston area. As historian Robert Gaudet observed, the Willis-Harrington Commission "was a group that was comprised mainly of non-politicians, an unusual situation in the annals of Massachusetts educational reform efforts."

As for the regional planning agencies, restructuring, consolidation and realignment of responsibilities and representation are in order. MAPC, the largest and most significant body, requires more visible and authoritative representation from all of the constituent agencies, a fresh look at boundaries aimed at enlarging the geographical oversight, and an analysis of restructuring MAPC itself to achieve manageable proportions. These basics are appropriate for the agenda of the urban commission successor to Willis-Harrington.

Most important of all, it is timely to consider a way to focus on the economic potential of the Boston region, concentrating on the development of the "Atlantic Rim." There is substantial precedent for such an effort in the establishment of the Greater Boston Economic Study Committee 40 years ago. A review of the substantial accomplishments of that body should strongly encourage that step.

Funded by the Committee for Economic Development, the GBESC received its impetus from the Boston College seminars in the 1950s which brought together civic and business leaders in a neutral academic environment. In a time when Boston appeared stagnating and urban renewal was largely an untested Federal program, the President of Boston College, Father Michael Walsh, convened and led a series of serious discussions on metropolitan issues.

GBESC, under the leadership of James McCormack, Vice President of M.I.T., and directed by Professor Gregory Wolf of Tufts, proved extremely effective in gathering reliable data about the economic

⁴² Robert Gaudet, "The Willis-Harrington Commission: The Politics of Education Reform," *New England Journal of Public Policy*, Summer/Fall 1987.

⁴³ Op. cit., p. 81.

transition Greater Boston was then experiencing and in formulating policy recommendations for both the public and private sectors to consider.

The Committee consisted of seventeen members: fourteen business leaders, a newspaper editor, and two deans of business administration. It established a 19-member research advisory committee drawn from the area's urban universities and research companies. In addition to support by the CED, Governor Foster Furcolo directed the Massachusetts Division of Economic Security to assist the Committee. In a series of reports, GBESC focused on the revitalization of downtown Boston, and concluded in 1959 that the then-new dispersion of jobs and households to the suburbs, combined with inner city physical decay and obsolescence, threatened a downtown "blight." A year earlier the Committee identified Boston's commuting problem as a major barrier to regional economic progress and urged that rapid transit be extended throughout the metropolitan area.

In subsequent studies, GBESC identified and anticipated the decline in traditional manufacturing, with some enumerated exceptions in women's apparel and the graphic arts. It singled out office employment, banking law, securities, and insurance as "confrontation" businesses requiring face to face contact for the exchange of information.

Then the Committee identified specific changes that were needed within the downtown if Boston were to escape stagnation:

- local tax assessment reform
- improved public administration
- updated building and zoning codes
- modernized rapid transit and automotive traffic systems, and
- expanded public and private planning for downtown and the metropolitan region.

Almost forty years later one is impressed by the foresight and accomplishments of the GBESC, although both the public and private sectors were perhaps more unified then. In the interim, the metropolitan, national and international economies have been transformed. So along with or in concert with a Legislative Commission, the first step toward assuring a more effective and prosperous Greater Boston region should be in the direction of these new initiatives.

The economy has been transformed, the public sector greatly improved and invigorated. The private sector is more accustomed to joint partnerships than before. In sum, the opportunity was never greater. Instead of devising and trying to implement new government structures—however desirable these may seem from the perspective of political scientists, planners, and many local politicians and activists—our first priority should be develop and then implement a metropolitan economic strategy to assure that Boston is where the new jobs and new opportunities are.

CHRONOLOGY OF REGIONALISM IN METROPOLITAN BOSTON, 1643-1997

1643

The "Great and General Court" organizes the 30 towns of Massachusetts into four counties—Essex, Middlesex, Norfolk, and Suffolk—based on the English model.

1856

The first inter-town horse car route opens. It runs from Central Square in Cambridge to Bowdoin Square at the foot of Beacon Hill.

1868

Roxbury is annexed to Boston.

1870

Dorchester is annexed to Boston.

1874

Charlestown, Brighton, and West Roxbury are annexed to Boston.

1875

The Metropolitan Park Commission (MPC) is formed as a result of a citizens' group petition intended to preserve Boston's "quality of life" by establishing a metropolitan park system.

1879

Frederick Law Olmstead supervises a comprehensive planning effort for the MPC to incorporate over 2,000 acres of land into a park system which will connect the newly annexed portions of the city. (This widely praised project is completed in 1895.)

1889

The legislature creates the Metropolitan Sewerage Commission (MSC) to construct and maintain a comprehensive waste water disposal system for Boston and 17 neighboring communities.

Boston's first electric streetcar operation begins. The first line goes from the Allston neighborhood of Boston through the town of Brookline to Park Street along Boston Common. Service is provided by the West End Street Railway Company, and later by the Boston Elevated Railway Company, both private firms.

1893

The legislature creates the Metropolitan Park Commission (MPC), serving Boston and 35 neighboring communities.

1895

The legislature creates the Metropolitan Water Board (MWB), serving Boston and 12 neighboring communities.

1898

The legislature gives new authority to the state Board of Railroad Commissioners, which is responsible for overseeing the finances of street railway companies requesting new routes. The Board is granted the statewide power to issue franchises to transit companies for connecting lines despite objections of the localities involved. At the same time, the Boston metropolitan region begins the process of replacing private ownership of street railways with public control.

1911

The legislature authorizes the formation of a commission to develop proposals for a metropolitan planning agency. The commissioners urge the legislature to establish a permanent and salaried Metropolitan Planning Board of five members (three appointed by the Governor, two by the Mayor of Boston) to prepare a comprehensive plan for Boston and 37 neighboring communities. To encourage local cooperation with the board, the commissioners recommend that the state contribute to the financing of metropolitan area projects. The proposal is killed by legislators from outlying towns.

1919

The legislature consolidates the Metropolitan sewerage, power, and water boards (MSC, MPC, and MWB) into the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC).

1923

A Metropolitan Planning Division is created within the MDC. The division is funded by local assessments, and its purview is confined to planning issues related to laying out parkways beyond the central city.

1931

The legislature creates a Metropolitan Transit District comprising 14 cities and towns to provide financing to retire the stock of the privately-owned Boston Elevated Railway Company. The MTD, which is administered by a board made up of four gubernatorial appointees and one appointee chosen by the mayor of Boston, is empowered to issue tax-exempt bonds to be paid off by assessments on the cities and towns in the district. The measure also establishes a Metropolitan Transit Council (MTC) to bring together the mayors and chairmen of the board of selectmen of the 14 cities and towns to decide whether operating deficits should be handled by fare hikes or assessments.

1941

The legislature transfers the MDC's planning division to a new State Planning Board, granting the metropolitan region no special recognition.

1944

Governor Leverett Saltonstall, Mayor Maurice Tobin of Boston, the presidents of Harvard, James B. Conant, and M.I.T., Karl Compton, the Boston Society of Architects and the Boston Chamber of Commerce sponsor the “Boston Contest of 1944” asking entrants to prepare specific proposals for “improving the political, economic, social, and physical environments for residents of the metropolitan area.”

The “Boston Contest of 1944” winner, Carl J. Friedrich, unveils his plan with great hoopla in Boston’s Faneuil Hall. Friedrich, a distinguished professor of government at Harvard, argues that the metropolitan area has “become ill, decaying at the core because its vitality has not been a common concern to those having a stake in it,” and proposes that all communities within a twenty-mile radius of the city join in a federation to be known as “The Boston Metropolitan Authority.” (The plan would fail because of concerns regarding local government autonomy.)

1946

Mayor James Curley of Boston assembles 350 representatives of “religious, educational, labor, industrial, commercial, civic, and financial organizations” to work with the City Planning Board to create a fifty-year plan for the city. The plan is prepared but never followed up with legislation.

Mayor Curley also calls for the formation of a “Greater Boston,” a federation of the forty-three cities and towns within a fifteen-mile radius of City Hall. Boston has slipped to eighth place in population among American cities; the federation would place Boston in fourth place and triple its population. Many of metropolitan Boston’s neighboring towns were lukewarm about the idea and it expires.

1947

The legislature passes a law establishing the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) to replace the MTD and the MTC. It is less representative, reflecting suburban resistance to metropolitan cooperation on transit matters. Some power is later restored.

1952

The legislature authorizes the MDC to build and operate a refuse disposal plant to serve seventeen communities. MDC and its municipalities are unable to agree on terms, and the bond issuing power lapsed.

1954

Section 701 of the Housing Act of 1954 makes federal grants available to metropolitan planning agencies.

1955

The legislature passes legislation enabling contiguous communities to form regional planning districts with purely advisory powers. Boston area cities and towns ignore the opportunity. Business and civic leaders mobilize support for a metropolitan planning agency.

1957

The Boston College Citizens’ Seminar (BCCS) is inaugurated to bring business leaders and academics together to address regional economic issues. Establishing a metropolitan planning agency is a primary priority.

1959

The legislature establishes a Mass Transportation Commission (MTC) to explore the coordination of highway, mass transit, and land-use policies in the metropolitan region.

1963

The legislature creates the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), with purely advisory powers. MAPC is authorized to conduct research and provide comprehensive planning assistance to communities. Control over the Council's policies rest with the cities and towns, but operations are paid for out of state appropriations, which the state can recover by population-based assessments on the participating communities.

1964

Governor Endicott Peabody endorses a restructuring of the deficit-ridden MTA. A new Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) is created, covering the original 14 cities and towns and 64 additional communities.

1966

A "Home Rule" amendment is passed which strengthens the authority of local governments by allowing them the power to control and implement expenditure decisions.

1969

Mayor Kevin White unveils a plan for a "Eastern Massachusetts Council of Governments," regionalizing government in the Greater Boston Area to allow for joint management and sharing of local costs and services. White's plan calls for creating a 200-member General Council from 100 cities and towns to provide a forum for solving common problems; and establishing regional governing control over the Massachusetts Bays Transit Authority (MBTA), the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC), Massachusetts Port Authority, and Metropolitan Boston Air Pollution Control District. It also calls for state takeover of the local costs of roads, veteran's benefits, and county functions; formation of an 18-member advisory council to handle the bulk of business; and a Greater Boston Regional Educational Service Center to provide services, programs, and materials to all school systems so as to even out fiscal disparities. Planning staff is to be provided through the existing Metropolitan Area Planning Council with new funds culled from a 5 cents per capita assessment in member communities.

1970

The legislature removes MAPC and the other regional planning agencies from the state government structure, granting MAPC greater control over its budget.

1974

Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) George Romney approaches Governor Francis W. Sargent with an offer of HUD funds to finance a study of novel approaches to metropolitan development.

1975

Governor Sargent appoints Robert Wood – the president of University of Massachusetts and former HUD Secretary and Undersecretary -- to head a metropolitan development Task Force pursuant to the HUD mandate. The Task Force recommends a “representative entity that would have the power to review developmental decisions of key regional importance.” The report is not developed into legislative proposals.

The legislature creates a “Special Commission on the Effects of Growth Patterns on the Quality of Life in the Commonwealth,” chaired by Senator Robert Wetmore (D-Barre), and known as the “Wetmore Commission.”

1977

The Wetmore Commission prepares a series of growth policy recommendations for specific actions that could be implemented at the municipal, regional, and state levels. An economic downturn and the election of Governor Michael Dukakis doom action on the recommendations.

1979

Governor Edward King establishes a Massachusetts Office of State Planning.

1980

Proposition 2½ is passed by statewide referendum, limiting municipal tax increases to 2½% per year. Municipalities begin to rely more heavily on the state for municipal funding.

1983

Governor Michael Dukakis dissolves the Massachusetts Office of State Planning.

1984

The legislature creates the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) water district, representing Boston and 37 neighboring cities and towns. The authority has rate-setting, bond-issuing, and pay-scale powers, without the requirement of legislative approval.

1986

The legislature appropriates additional state funds for MAPC and other regional planning agencies for state and regional planning initiatives (Chapter 763, Acts of 1986) due largely to the lobbying efforts of the Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies (MARPA).

1987

“Blueprint 2000” is released. “Blueprint 2000” is an action plan describing what Massachusetts can look like in the year 2000, prepared at the initiative of Lt. Governor Evelyn Murphy. The project establishes a vision of future initiatives in all areas, including jobs, transportation, housing, environmental protection, and planning. It also proposes broadening the scope of state funding to a more comprehensive approach.

1988

The legislature appoints a “Special Commission on Growth and Change” to examine state land-use policy.

1989

The McCormack Institute of Public Affairs at University of Massachusetts sponsors its second annual seminar on regionalism entitled, "Southeastern Massachusetts: Maintaining Momentum." Speakers include Amy Anthony and Frederick Salvucci, Secretaries of Executive Offices of Communities and Development and Transportation; Daniel Greenbaum, Commissioner, Department of Environmental Protection; and Congressman Joseph Kennedy.

1990

MAPC unveils "MetroPlan 2000," a development plan for regional growth. Its recommendations are praised but largely ignored.

The final report of the "Special Commission on Growth and Change" is released. It emphasizes the creation of an integrated, coordinated land-use planning process with incentives for communities to plan for growth.

The McCormack Institute sponsors its third annual seminar on regionalism entitled "Land Use: Forgotten Key to Quality of Life."

1991

The McCormack Institute sponsors its fourth annual seminar on regionalism entitled "Growth Management, Land Use, Regionalism, and the Environment."

1992

The Subcommittee on Regionalism of the Joint Committee on Local Affairs, chaired by Representative Douglas Petersen (D-Marblehead), starts to examine regional governance in Massachusetts. The committee's charge is to develop recommendations leading to legislation that will provide the framework for a "simplified, uniform, and viable" set of regional governance structures throughout the Commonwealth.

The McCormack Institute sponsors its fifth annual seminar on regionalism, entitled "Rx for Recovery: Planned Growth in a Protected Environment."

The Southeastern Regional Services Group (SERSG) is instituted through the Executive Office of Communities and Development's municipal incentive grants. SERSG allows four communities to participate in joint purchasing efforts. A noted example of "grassroots regionalism," the number of participating communities later increased to eighteen.

1993

McCormack Institute sponsors its sixth annual seminar on regionalism entitled "The Job Ahead: Planned Growth in a Protected Environment."

1994

Representative Barbara Gray (D-Framingham) files coordinated land-use legislation entitled the "Massachusetts Planning and Development Act."

The legislature's new Subcommittee on Regionalism releases a "white paper" offering four models for implementing a "new regionalism" in Massachusetts.

The Boston Globe and M.I.T. sponsor The Boston Conference which focuses heavily on metropolitan issues.

The McCormack Institute sponsors its seventh annual seminar on regionalism, entitled "Regionalism: Moving Massachusetts Into the 21st Century."

"Choosing to Compete: A Statewide Strategy for Job Creation and Economic Growth" is prepared at the request and direction of Governor Weld. It represents a collaboration between the Executive Office of Economic Affairs and the University of Massachusetts, assisted by Michael Porter and Rebecca Wayland of Harvard Business School, and Jeffrey Grogan of The Monitor Company. The project leads to a series of focus sessions and conferences throughout the state regarding regional issues and opportunities, promoting grassroots support of the initiative. Although dominated by the public sector, the project fosters a sense of regional cooperation relative to economic development issues.

1995

Mayor Thomas Menino files legislation to establish a Commission on Intermunicipal Cooperation in the Greater Boston Area, charged with examining cooperation among municipalities. The legislation passes with \$100,000 matching funds from the state.

Mayor Menino and the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) sponsor a conference on regional collaboration at the Kennedy Library. The emphasis is on joint service delivery.

McCormack Institute sponsors its eighth annual seminar on regionalism, entitled "2005: Getting an Edge on the Future."

1996

Representative Petersen reconvenes the Subcommittee on Regionalism, concentrating on downloading state services and increasing the planning provisions in existing legislation.

The City of Worcester sponsors a conference on regional collaboration at Holy Cross College.

Worcester legislators file legislation similar to Mayor Menino's, establishing a temporary regional collaboration commission to make recommendations regarding increased efficiency and cost savings generated through intermunicipal cooperation.

Governor William Weld signs Executive Order No. 385 relative to "Planning for Growth." The Executive Order requests that agencies within the Commonwealth evaluate their current "regulations, policies, plans, and practices" to assure that they facilitate sustainable economic development and preserve environmental quality and resources. In doing so, all agencies are required to grant full consideration to local and regional growth management plans. The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) is granted the

responsibility of assuring that all agencies comply with this act, and of hiring a Growth Management Director who will be responsible for the order's implementation.

Mayor Thomas Menino of Boston convenes first meeting of the Commission on Intermunicipal Cooperation in May. Members include Mayor Menino, Geri Denterlein of McDermott/O'Neil & Associates; George Russell of State Street Bank; Frank Tramontozzi of Boston Water and Sewer; Robert Woodbury of the McCormack Institute of Public Affairs; Leslie Kirwin of the Executive Office of Administration and Finance; David Soule of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council; Senator Robert Travaglini; Mayor Michael Capuano of Somerville; Selectman Donna Kalikov of Brookline; Mayor John McCarthy of Everett; and Selectman Mark Siegenthaler of Bedford.

Senator Frederick Berry (D-Peabody) attaches an amendment to FY 1997 budget requesting \$50,000 for the City of Peabody to provide staff to facilitate regional collaboration between Peabody, Salem, Danvers, and Beverly.

1997

The Commission on Intermunicipal Cooperation, now known as the Regionalization Commission, issues its final report in July.

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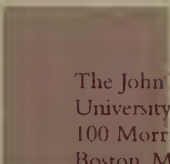
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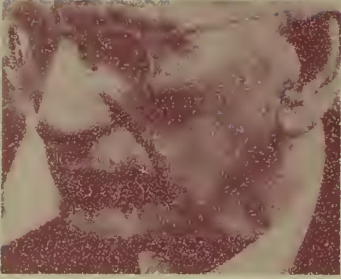
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