Smart Growth: The Future of the American Metropolis?

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Editorial Note

Bruce Katz is Senior Fellow and Director of the Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. He presented an earlier version of this paper as a part of the CASE Social Exclusion Seminar Series in February 2002.

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Abstract

In the past few years, widespread frustration with sprawling development patterns has precipitated an explosion in innovative thinking and action across the United States. This new thinking – generally labeled as “smart growth” – contends that the shape and quality of metropolitan growth in America are no longer desirable or sustainable. It argues that metropolitan areas could grow in radically different ways if major government policies on land use, infrastructure and taxation were overhauled.

This essay discusses the current state of smart growth and metropolitan thinking in the United States. It outlines the demographic, market and development trends that are affecting metropolitan areas and the consequences of these trends for central cities, older suburbs, newer communities and low-income and minority families. It describes how current government policies facilitate the excessive decentralization of people and jobs and how smart growth reforms are being enacted, particularly at the state level, to shape new, more urban-friendly, growth patterns. It concludes by identifying the major challenges that smart growth needs to address if it is going to succeed in shaping new, sustainable metropolitan communities.

Keywords: Smart growth, sprawl, metropolitan governance, decentralization, urban revitalization, economic competitiveness, sustainability, tax and regulatory policy

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Foreword: Divided Cities – What Britain can learn from America

Around the globe, cities are growing at an incredible rate. In 2001 there were 19 mega-cities of over 10 million, and 392 cities of over 1 million people (UNCHS, 2001). The scale of urbanisation is vastly greater and faster in the developing world of the South, creating life-threatening over-crowding in sprawling informal settlements.

Europe, with its longer-running urbanised societies, and the United States, still in some ways regarded as a frontier society yet rapidly hitting the buffers of traffic congestion, unmanageable sprawl and opposition to further outward growth, are struggling to contain over-urbanisation. Urban polarisation within cities and suburban sprawl by more affluent households around the edges is creating unmanageable tensions over land-use, the "right to drive", immigration and racial inequality.

In the United Kingdom, the problems of concentrated poverty in older inner city areas, now commonly bracketed under the umbrella of social exclusion, are increasingly matched by the continuing low-density greenfield house building, the popularity of out-of-town shopping centres, the ever-increasing reliance on cars, the resulting loss of viable bus and other transport solutions, the sharp divisions in school standards between cities and their hinterlands, and the seemingly sudden recognition of incipient racial segregation all over the country.

This sharp divide within cities has become a generator of "white flight" by more affluent households to the outskirts (Cantle, 2002).

The problem of cities was the focus of the Urban Task Force set up by the British Government and chaired by Richard Rogers, the international architect. This move gave an unexpectedly high profile to the problem of depleted, decaying cities and straggling, low-density, unsustainable outer growth. It advocated "compact cities", shorthand for concentrated revitalisation of existing urban infrastructure, reuse of abandoned brownfield land, the creation of more socially mixed, and therefore more viable, inner neighbourhoods. It argued strongly that building on Greenfield land at extreme low density – on average 25 homes to the hectare or 10 homes to the acre – was unsustainable socially, economically, and environmentally. As a result, 40% of all new building land goes under tarmac, mostly funded by the Government. Far more seriously the Government is forced to fund the expensive declining inner city services and also meet the long-term costs of the demand by expanding more affluent outer areas for better schools, environmental conditions, roads and so on.

In a sea-locked and heavily urbanised and crowded island, this pattern cannot last. Developers know it, the Government too, and most of all the people who have fought and paid for their privileged suburban lifestyle. Each new development – houses, roads, supermarkets – is heavily contested.

It was an eye-opener to many housing, social policy and planning experts to learn in February 2002 that the United States, with 25 times the land per person that the UK has, was grappling with and starting to tackle similar problems. This paper, by Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution and urban policy adviser to many American mayors, metropolitan and state governments, sets out the American case against sprawl, the new experiments in "smart growth" or "compact urban development" as Richard Rogers calls it, and the government-level policy shifts in its favour. Many of these problems are growing in the United States in parallel with UK and European concerns over similar issues – the impact of increasing car use on cities and their surrounds.

We can learn greatly from the American experience. Our urban society is more compact, more racially integrated, more public service oriented. Yet the urban trends in this country and elsewhere in Europe suggest an alarming similarity, if not yet in intensity, at least in direction. Sprawl and racial divisions, as the Government's reports on the Oldham, Bradford and Burnley race riots show, are in danger of fuelling an explosive clash between north and south, between boom and abandonment. This important paper should help shape the global debate on sustainable urban development showcased in Johannesburg in summer 2002, and in the UK at its first urban summit in Birmingham in October 2002.

Anne Power
July 2002

Introduction

In the past few years, widespread frustration with sprawling development patterns has precipitated an explosion in innovative thinking and action across the United States. This new thinking – generally labelled as “smart growth” – contends that the shape and quality of metropolitan growth in America are no longer desirable or sustainable. It asserts that current growth patterns undermine urban economies and broader environmental objectives and exacerbate deep racial, ethnic and class divisions. It argues that these growth patterns are not inevitable but rather the result of major government policies that distort the market and facilitate the excessive decentralization of people and jobs.

Across the country, smart growth language and rhetoric have become common not only among political, civic and corporate leaders but also among developers and other participants in the real estate industry. A growing chorus of constituencies – corporations, local elected officials, environmentalists, ordinary citizens – are demanding that the market and the government change the way they do business and take actions to curb sprawl, promote urban reinvestment and build communities of quality and distinction. Governors and state legislatures are responding by proposing and enacting important reforms in governance, land use and infrastructure policies. Voters at the ballot box are regularly approving measures to address the consequences of sprawling development patterns.

This is a powerful paradigm shift, a sweeping rethinking of the costs and consequences of metropolitan growth in the country. It offers a compelling vision of how to achieve environmental quality, urban revitalization, economic competitiveness and even racial and social justice in metropolitan America.

This essay discusses the current state of smart growth and metropolitan thinking in the United States. It outlines the demographic, market and development trends that are affecting metropolitan areas and the consequences of these trends for central cities, older suburbs, newer communities and low-income and minority families. It describes the rising tide of smart growth reforms, particularly at the state level. It concludes by identifying the major challenges that smart growth needs to address if it is going to succeed in shaping new, sustainable metropolitan communities.

How Metropolitan America Grows

The release of the 2000 US census created an almost euphoric mood among many long-time observers of American cities. New York City topped 8 million people for the first time. Cities left for dead not long ago – Boston, Atlanta, Chicago – registered strong population growth. With visible signs of prosperity in refurbished downtowns, with immigrants spurring neighborhood revitalization, with homeownership rates generally going up and poverty and crime rates generally going down, many American cities are enjoying a hard-won optimism.

Yet a closer look at the census (and other market trends) shows that the decentralization of economic and residential life, not the renewal of core cities, remains the dominant growth pattern in the United States. America's cities and metropolitan areas are experiencing similar patterns of growth and development – explosive sprawl where farmland once reigned, matched by decline or slower growth in the central cities and older suburbs. Suburban areas, some of which were small towns a few decades ago, are capturing the lion's share of population and employment growth. In the largest metropolitan areas, the rate of population growth for suburbs was twice that of central cities – 9.1 percent versus 18 percent – from 1990 to 2000 (Berube, 2002). Suburban growth outpaced city growth irrespective of whether a city's population was falling like Baltimore or staying stable like Kansas City or rising rapidly like Denver. Even sunbelt cities like Phoenix, Dallas and Houston grew more slowly than their suburbs.

Percentage growth only tells part of the story. More and more people are living, working, shopping and paying taxes at the farthest edges of metropolitan areas. Atlanta, often touted as a "turnaround city", is a case in point. The central city grew by a respectable 6 percent during the 1990s and gained 22,000 people. Yet its metropolitan area grew by 39 percent during this period and gained 1.1 million people. Incredibly, rural counties dozens of miles from the central business district gained more people – in both percentage and absolute terms – than the city of Atlanta. Both Henry County and Forsyth County, for example, more than doubled their population in the 1990s and now have 119,000 and 98,000 people respectively.

As people go, so do jobs. Consequently, the suburbs now dominate employment growth and are no longer just bedroom communities for workers commuting to traditional downtowns. Rather, they are now strong employment centers serving a variety of functions in their regional economies. The American economy is rapidly becoming an “exit ramp” economy, with office, commercial and retail facilities increasingly located along suburban freeways. This is particularly true in leading technology regions like Washington, D.C., Austin and Boston where firms like American Online, Dell and Raytheon have built large exurban campuses far from the city center.

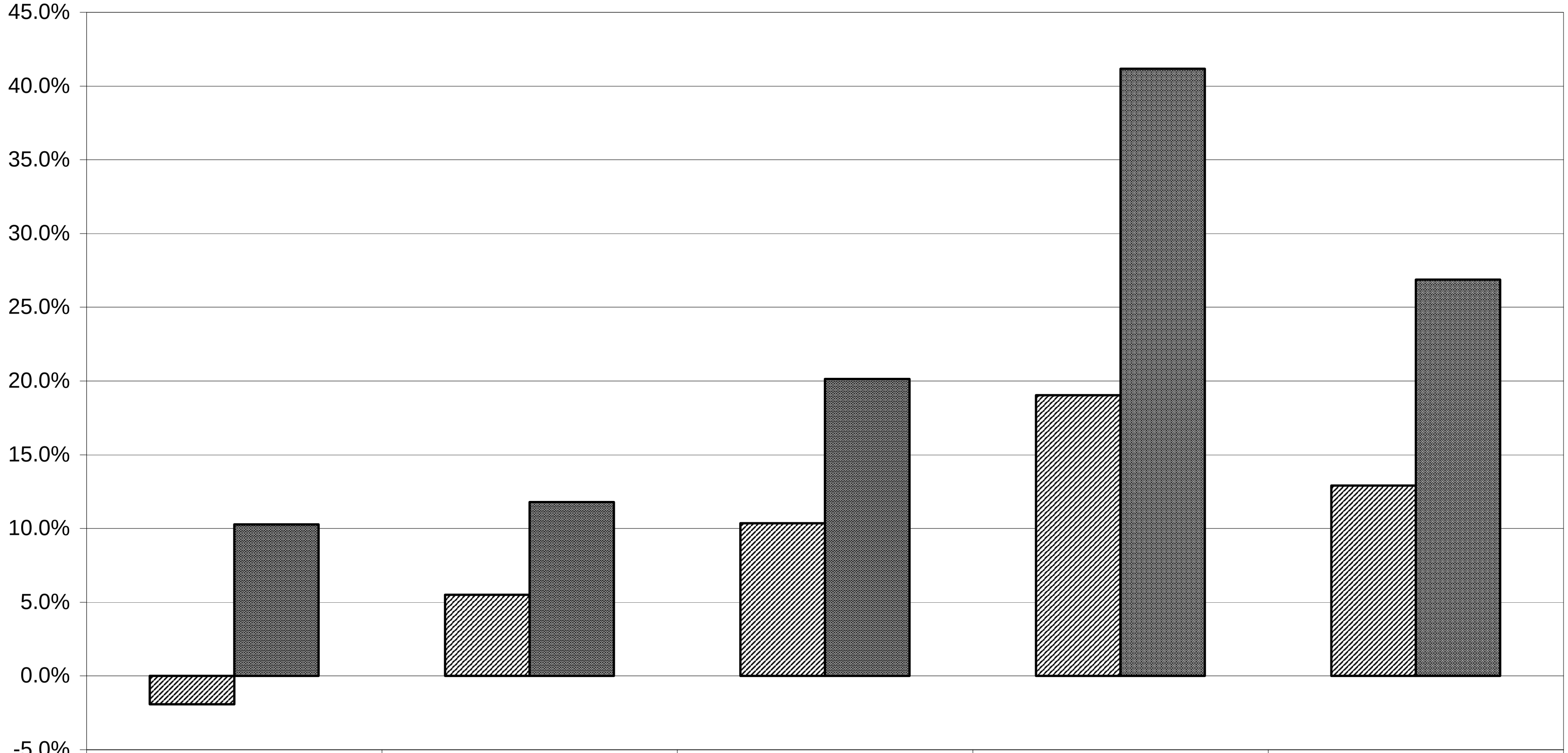
As Edward Glaeser and Matthew Kahn have recently demonstrated, employment decentralization has become the norm in American metropolitan areas. Across the largest 100 metro areas, on average, only 22 percent of people work within three miles of the city center and more than 35 percent work more than ten miles from the central core. In cities like Chicago, Atlanta and Detroit, employment patterns have radically altered, with more than 60 percent of the regional employment now located more than 10 miles from the city center (Glaeser and Kahn, 2001).

The New Suburban Reality

The decentralization of American life and the changing demographics in the country are creating new, complex metropolitan communities. Today, five in ten Americans live in suburbs, up from three in ten in 1960. With suburbs taking on a greater share of the country’s population, they are beginning to look more and more like urban areas. The latest information from the 2000 Census paints a picture of dynamic change and incredible heterogeneity – a far cry from the suburban image fixed in our collective mind.

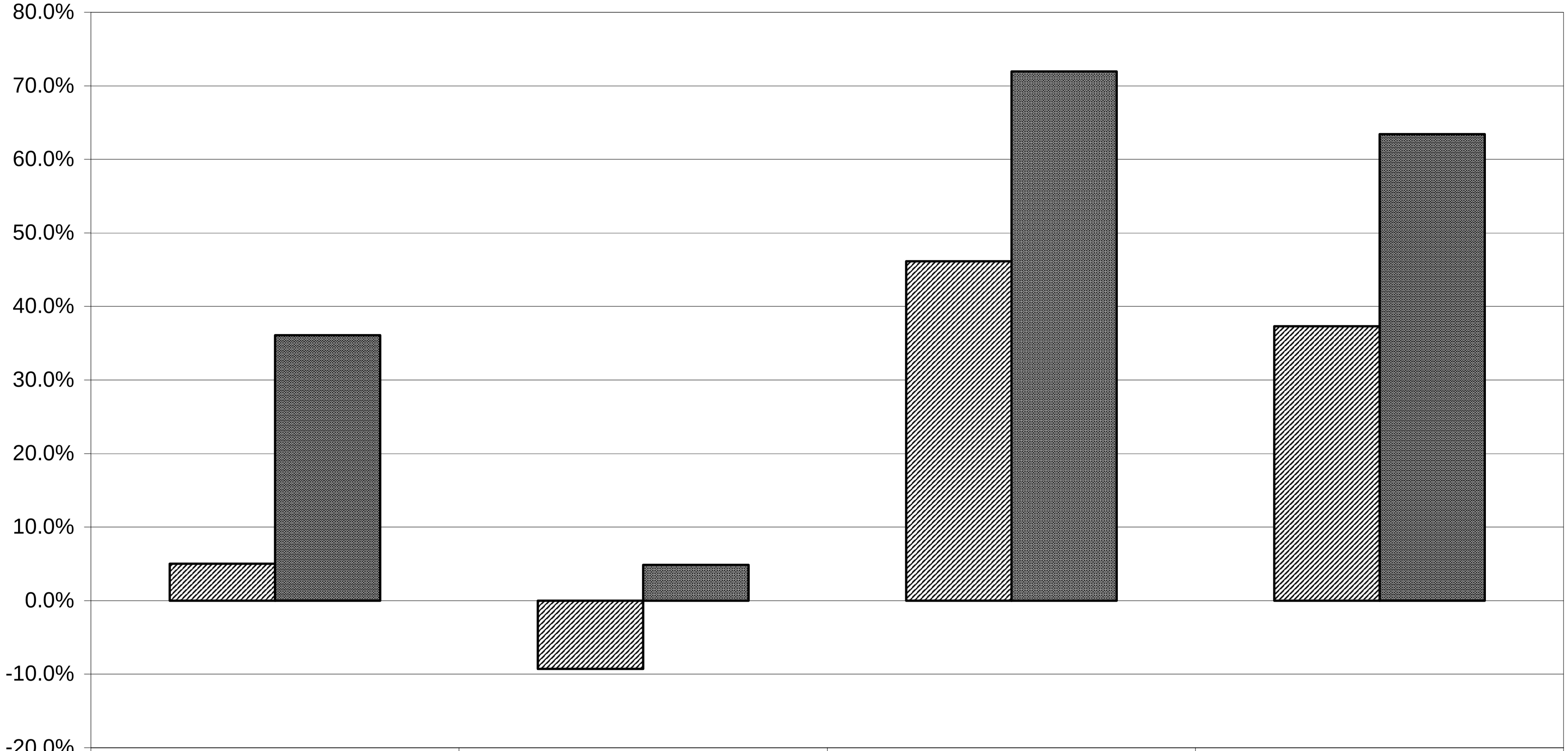
Suburbs are home to an expanding array of family types. As in earlier decades, suburbs are still the preferred domains of married couples with school-aged children – in the largest metropolitan areas, three quarters of these households live in suburbs. Yet suburbs are also attracting household types that only a short time ago were selecting cities. These include young singles starting their first job, elderly persons living alone after the death of a spouse, divorced moms with young children, and a growing number of empty nesters who find themselves with time (and space) on their hands when children leave for college or work. As Figure 1 shows, every household type grew at faster rates in the suburbs than in the cities.

Figure 1 - Growth of Household Type by Location, 1990 - 2000



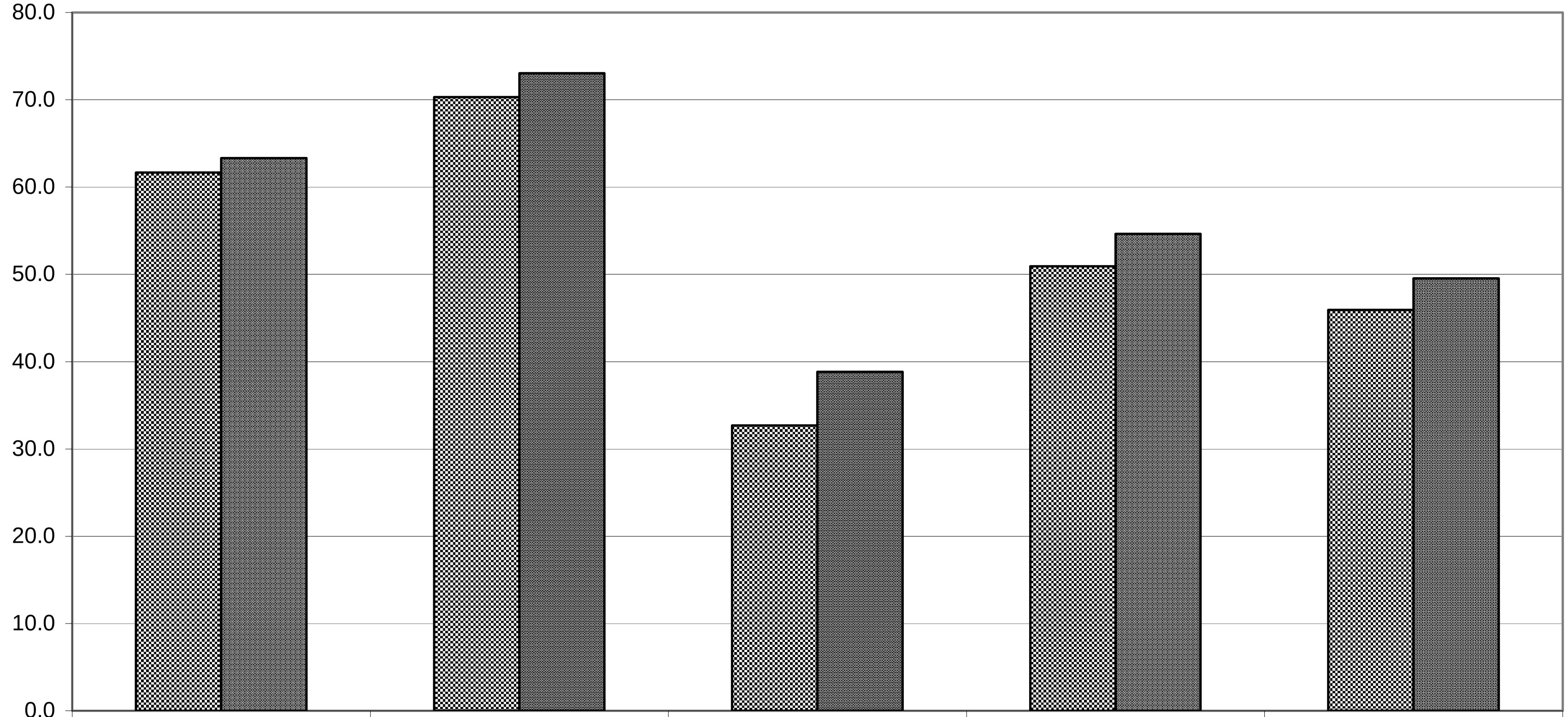
	Married - no children	Married - with children	Other Family - no children	Other Family - with children	Nonfamily
Central City	-1.9%	5.5%	10.4%	19.0%	12.9%
Suburbs	10.3%	11.8%	20.1%	41.2%	26.9%

Figure 2 - Population Growth by Race/Ethnicity and Location, 1990 - 2000



	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian
Central City	5.0%	-9.3%	46.2%	37.3%
Suburbs	36.1%	4.8%	71.9%	63.4%

Figure 3. Share of Racial/Ethnic Groups Living in Suburbs, 1990-2000



	All Races	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
1990	61.6	70.3	32.7	50.9	45.9
2000	63.3	73.0	38.8	54.6	49.6

The cumulative impact of these trends is astounding. The 2000 US census showed that, for the first time, the suburbs contained more non-families – people living alone or with non-relatives – than married couples with children. In 2000, 29 percent of all suburban households were non-families, while 27 percent were married couples with children (Frey and Berube, 2002).

Suburbs, in general, are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. In many metropolitan areas, the explosive growth in immigrants in the past decade skipped the cities and went directly to the suburbs. Racial and ethnic minorities now make up more than a quarter (27 percent) of suburban populations, up from 19 percent in 1990. As the attached chart demonstrates, every minority group grew at faster rates in the suburbs during the past decade (see Figure 2). The percentage of each racial/ethnic group living in the suburbs, therefore, increased substantially (see Figure 3) (Frey, 2001).

The greater Washington, D.C. area – the 5th largest magnet for immigrants in the 1990s – demonstrates the changing spatial dynamics of immigration. A recent study showed that 87 percent of the new arrivals settled in suburban communities. An incredible 46 percent of new arrivals, particularly from Asia, settled outside the area's beltway (traditionally the demarcation between older, urbanized communities and newer, suburban communities) (Singer, et. al., 2001).

These demographic changes, of course, are not uniform across all suburban jurisdictions. Most metropolitan areas in the United States remain sharply divided along racial, ethnic and class lines. Racial segregation, in particular, persists in the residential housing market. In the Chicago metropolis, for example, 68 percent of African American residents live in the central city; 90 percent live in the city and the urban county (Cook County). In the Washington, D.C. metropolis, 66 percent of African American residents live in Washington, D.C. and Prince George's County.

These patterns of racial segregation correspond closely with metropolitan growth dynamics. In many metropolitan areas, African American residents are increasingly living "on the wrong side of the region", away from areas of employment growth and educational opportunity. In the Washington, D.C. metropolis, wealth, prosperity and opportunity tend to be located on the western side of the region (where few African American residents live). By contrast, the eastern side of the region is characterized by lower employment growth, lower levels of investment and business formation and increasing poverty concentration in the schools (Liu and Katz, 1999).

The Consequences of Unbalanced Growth

The shape of metropolitan growth in America has disparate impacts on central cities, older suburbs and rapidly growing areas. Central cities, while generally improving, remain home to the nation's very poor. While poverty has declined in central cities, for example, urban poverty rates are still twice as high as suburban poverty rates, 16.4% versus 8.0% in 1999. Cities are also disproportionately home to families whose earnings are above the poverty level, but below median income (Berube and Forman, 2001).

Cities are not just home to too many poor families; they are also home to neighborhoods where poverty is concentrated. From 1970 to 1990, the number of people living in neighborhoods of high poverty – where the poverty rate is 40% or more – nearly doubled from 4.1 million to 8 million. As Paul Jargowsky, John Powell and others have shown, concentrated poverty is principally an urban (and racial) phenomenon. The implications of concentrated poverty are severe. People in these neighborhoods often face a triple whammy: poor schools, weak job information networks, and scarce jobs. They are more likely to live in female-headed households and have less formal education than residents of other neighborhoods (Jargowsky, 1997).

Yet the consequences of sprawl are not confined to central cites. Metropolitan growth patterns are also transforming the suburbs. Like city neighborhoods, there are a wide range of suburban experiences and realities. Although American popular culture tends to paint a picture of the monolithic "suburb", the reality on the ground is infinitely more complex.

At one end of the continuum lie suburbs built in the early or mid part of the 20th century that are experiencing central city-like challenges – aging infrastructure, deteriorating schools and commercial corridors, and inadequate housing stock (Orfield, 1997). Like cities, these older communities require reinvestment and redevelopment. As a recent Brookings report concluded: "Many first suburbs … have older infrastructure that suffers from age and limited maintenance. Unfortunately, in some "home rule" states, the prevailing opinion is "once you build it, you're on your own". In other words, while state governments may be eager to assist newly developing communities on the fringe, fully developed places are expected to manage by themselves" (Puentes and Orfield, 2002).

The pricetag for deferred maintenance is severe. It is estimated, for example, that over the next 30 years, southeast Michigan will need $29 billion to $52 billion to maintain and improve their sewage collection and treatment system. The City of South Euclid, Ohio recently estimated that it would cost $200 million over 20 years to overhaul their storm and sanitary systems (Puentes and Orfield, 2002).

Many of these older suburbs are also becoming home to the working poor. These families are struggling as their wages have not kept pace with the rising costs of housing, childcare, transportation and other necessities of daily living. In the Atlanta metropolitan area, for example, 86 percent of the children in the central city public school system qualify for free or reduced cost lunch (an indicator of low income). Yet the proportion of poor children is also extremely high in such older suburbs as DeKalb County (60 percent) and Clayton County (53 percent) (Bradley, Katz and Liu, 2000). The city-versus-suburb idea makes little sense in trying to describe these places, because their differences from the cities are becoming less important than their similarities.

At the other end of the suburban continuum lie the newest ring of suburbs that is emerging at the fringe of metropolitan areas. These places – Loudoun County in Northern Virginia, Douglas County outside Denver, the Route 495 corridor around Boston – are growing at a feverish pace. Yet it is a particular kind of growth – unplanned, low-density, and auto-dependent. For residents in these communities, suburban prosperity has come with the heavy, unanticipated price of traffic congestion, overcrowded schools, disappearing open space and diminished quality of life.

Loudoun County, a boom suburb in Northern Virginia, epitomizes this kind of place. The overall population of Loudoun, increased by 96.9 percent from 1990 to 2000; the school population increased by 78 percent during the same period. The county school board predicts that it will have to build 22 new schools by 2005 to accommodate an abundance of new students. Suburbs like Loudoun simply cannot maintain their standards. There are simply too many new people who need too much new, expensive infrastructure – not just schools, but sewer and water lines, libraries, fire stations, and roads.

The patterns of extensive growth in some communities and significantly less growth in others are inextricably linked. Poor schools in one jurisdiction push out families and lead to overcrowded schools in other places. A lack of affordable housing in thriving job centers leads to long commutes on crowded freeways for a region’s working families. Expensive housing – out of the reach of most households – in many close-in neighborhoods creates pressures to pave over and build on open space in outlying areas, as people decide that they have to move outwards to build a future.

The cumulative impacts of these trends are severe. Many American metropolitan areas are struggling with traffic problems, environmental problems and a wide gap – both spatial and social – between low-income people and jobs.

Traffic congestion has become a way of life in most major metropolitan areas. A recent study by the Texas Transportation Institute of 68 metropolitan areas in the US found that the average annual delay per person was 36 hours or the equivalent of about one workweek of lost time. The total congestion bill in 1999 for these places came to $78 billion, which was the value of 4.5 billion hours of delay and 6.8 billion gallons of excess fuel consumed (Texas Transportation Institute, 2001).

Congestion and auto dependence also affect the pocketbooks of metropolitan residents and commuters. The shape of suburban growth – low density housing, low density employment centers – have made residents and commuters completely dependent on the car for all travel needs. Across the country, household spending on transportation has risen substantially. Transportation is now the second largest expense for most American households, consuming on average 18 cents out of every dollar. Only shelter eats up a larger chunk of expenditures (19 cents), with food a distant third (13 cents) (Surface Transportation Policy Project, 2000).

The transportation burden disproportionately affects the poor and working poor. Households earning between $12,000 and $23,000 spend 27 cents of every dollar they earn on transportation. For the very poor (households who earn less than $12,000), the transportation burden rises to 36 cents per dollar.

Unbalanced growth and the outward movement of metropolitan areas has taken its toll on green space. Urbanized land increased by over 47 percent between 1982 and 1997. The pace appears to be quickening. In the five-year period between 1992 and 1997, the pace of development (2.2 million acres a year) was more than 1.5 times that of the previous 10-year period (1.4 million acres a year). What is remarkable is that the growth in urbanized land is occurring even in metropolitan areas that lost population. The Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania metropolis lost 8 percent of its population between 1982 and 1997; yet its urbanized land area grew by close to 43 percent during this period (Fulton, et. al., 2001).

The broader environment suffers as metropolitan economies decentralize and subdivisions replace forestland and prime farmland. Researchers in Atlanta have demonstrated the powerful connection between driving, land use and air pollution. Rapid and unbalanced growth has also degraded the water quality of rivers and lakes because of polluted runoff from new, environmentally unfriendly developments. Deforestation threatens the health of the urban ecosystem since trees slow stormwater, reduce runoff and improve air quality (Bradley, Katz and Liu, 2000).

Finally, unbalanced growth has enormous social implications for low-wage and minority workers. As economies and opportunity decentralize and working poverty concentrates, a “spatial mismatch” has arisen between jobs and people (Pugh, 1998). In suburbs, entry-level jobs abound in manufacturing, wholesale trade and retailing. All offer opportunities for people with limited education and skills, and many pay higher wages than similar positions in the central cities. But persistent residential racial discrimination and a lack of affordable suburban housing effectively cut many inner city minorities off from regional labor markets. Low rates of car ownership and inadequate public transit keep job seekers in the core from reaching the jobs at the fringe. Often, inner city workers, hobbled by poor information networks, do not even know that these jobs exist.

Given the spatial mismatch, the implementation of welfare reform appears to be a special problem in urban areas. While welfare caseloads are shrinking in most cities, with some exceptions they are not shrinking as quickly as they are in the states and in the nation as a whole. A city’s share of a state’s welfare population often far outstrips its share of the state population as a whole. Philadelphia is now home to 12 percent of all Pennsylvanians, but 49 percent of Pennsylvanians on welfare. Baltimore has 13 percent of Maryland’s population, but 56 percent of its welfare recipients (Allen and Kirby, 2000).

Why Sprawl?

Sprawl is a simple term but a complex phenomenon. Consumer preferences and market restructuring play critical roles. So do the varying quality of schools in a metropolitan area, the location of affordable housing and the stratification of our housing markets by race, class and ethnicity.

Yet major federal and state spending programs, tax expenditures, regulatory and administrative policies have also fundamentally shaped growth patterns in metropolitan areas. Federal and state policies, taken together, set “rules of the development game” that tend to facilitate the decentralization of the economy and the concentration of urban poverty (Katz and Bradley, 1999).

Federal and state transportation spending, for example, has a profound impact on the pace and shape of metropolitan growth. Highway spending helps define the boundaries of metropolitan areas, determining where households and firms can locate their homes and facilities. In many metropolitan areas, transportation policies generally support the expansion of road capacity at the fringe of metropolitan areas and beyond, enabling people and businesses to live miles from urban centers but still benefit from metropolitan life. The spatial implications of these policies cannot be underestimated. As Marlon Boarnet and Andrew Haughwout have written, "The evidence implies that much of the economic impact of highways is to shift activity across the landscape, suggesting that some local benefits are, in part, at the expense of other places that might lose economic activity as a result of a highway project." (Boarnet and Haughwout, 2000).

Tax and regulatory policies have given added impetus to people's choices to move further and further out. The favorable tax treatment provided to homeownership appears spatially neutral but in practice favors higher income households and suburban communities (Gyourko and Voith, 1997). Major environmental policies have also made the redevelopment of urban land prohibitively expensive and cumbersome, increasing the attraction of suburban land.

Other federal and state policies have concentrated poverty rather than enhancing access to opportunity. Many suburban jurisdictions, under the aegis of state law, establish zoning regulations, such as large lot requirements for single-family homes or tight limits on land zoned for multifamily housing, that have the practical effect of barring low-income households. Until recently, federal public housing catered almost exclusively to the very poor by housing them in special units concentrated in isolated neighborhoods. More than half of public housing residents still live in high poverty neighborhoods; only 7 percent live in low poverty neighborhoods, where fewer than 10 percent of residents are poor (Turner, 1998). The spatial distribution of affordable housing using federal low-income housing tax credits – currently the main federal mechanism for stimulating the production of affordable rental housing – may be following similar patterns. Recent research has shown that states allocate the credits predominantly to distressed inner city areas, thereby exacerbating the concentration of poverty and the spatial mismatch between jobs and low income workers (Sidor, 2002).

Even the federal housing voucher program – which, in theory, promotes mobility among low-income recipients – has failed to offset other forces leading to residential segregation. By devolving administrative responsibility for housing vouchers to thousands of local public housing authorities, the federal government has made it difficult for low-income families to know about suburban housing vacancies and exercise choice in a metropolitan housing market (Katz and Turner, 2001).

Smart Growth and The New Metropolitan Agenda

An emerging awareness of the costs of sprawl – and the role of government policies in facilitating sprawl – is triggering an intense debate about growth around the country. Elected officials from cities and inner suburbs; downtown corporate, philanthropic, and civic interests; minority and low-income community representatives; environmentalists and land conservationists; slow-growth advocates in the new suburbs; farmers and rural activists; and religious leaders all are realizing that uncoordinated suburban expansion brings needless costs.

These constituencies are beginning to define, advocate for and implement a smart growth agenda at all levels of government. This agenda principally revolves around changing the state "rules of the development game" to slow decentralization, promote urban reinvestment and promote a new form of development that is mixed use, transit-oriented and pedestrian friendly.

While the building of new coalitions is taking place at all levels, state governments have become the principal targets of reform for many of these coalitions. This reflects the recognition that states have the most extensive impact on growth trends – in part because of their traditional control over issues like land use, governance, and local taxation and in part because of their increased powers in areas like transportation, workforce, housing and welfare policy due to federal devolution.

In recent years, support for smart growth reforms has increased markedly among governors and state legislatures. According to the American Planning Association:

> "More than 2000 planning bills were introduced between 1999 and 2001 with approximately 20 percent of the bills being approved;
>
> 17 governors issued 19 executive orders on planning, smart growth and related topics during the past two years

compared to 12 orders during the previous eight years combined;

Eight states issued legislative task force reports on smart growth between 1999 and 2001, compared to 10 reports between 1990 and 1998

27 governors – 15 republicans, 10 democrats and 2 independents – made specific planning and smart growth proposals in 2001" (American Planning Association, 2002).

States have, therefore, become the critical focus for creating a smart growth framework of law, program and policy. The smart growth agenda generally consists of five sets of complementary policies. First, states are experimenting with new forms of metropolitan governance to handle such issues as transportation, environmental protection, waste management, cultural amenities, and economic development. Second, they have embraced land use reforms to manage growth at the metropolitan fringe. Third, they are using state resources to preserve tracts of land threatened by sprawl as well as reclaim urban land for productive use. Fourth, they have begun to steer infrastructure investment and other resources to older established areas. Finally, they are considering tax reforms to reduce fiscal disparities between jurisdictions and reduce the competition between jurisdictions for sprawl inducing commercial development (Katz, 1999).

Each of these reforms will be discussed in turn.

Metropolitan Governance

States are extending metropolitan governance over activities that naturally cross borders and benefit residents of an entire region, including transportation, land use planning, and economic development. The most ambitious efforts are under way in Oregon and Minnesota. These states have created multipurpose regional entities in Portland and the Twin Cities to carry out certain operational and planning functions. In 1978 Oregon created the Greater Portland Metropolitan Service District, an elected body that oversees regional transportation and land use planning, including the development and preservation of the urban growth boundary. It also operates the mass transit system, various parks, and cultural facilities. In the early 1990s, Minnesota placed all regional sewer, transit, and land use planning in the Twin Cities area under a single entity, the Metropolitan Council. The state's action transformed a planning agency with a $40 million budget into a regional authority with a $600 million annual budget.

Georgia has become the most recent state to experiment with metropolitan governance. In early 1999, the state established the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, a new regional transportation authority in the Atlanta metropolitan area with sweeping powers over land use, transportation and development.

Growth Management

Since the early 1970s, twelve states – Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin – have enacted statewide comprehensive planning reforms. Oregon has the most comprehensive growth management effort in the United States. In 1973 the state enacted the Land Conservation and Development Act to contain urban sprawl and preserve forests and farmland. The Act requires that urban growth boundaries be drawn around all cities throughout the state and mandates comprehensive land use planning at both the local and metropolitan level. The Act also requires that all city, county, and metropolitan plans be consistent with state planning goals and authorizes the State Land Conservation and Development Commission to enforce compliance with the consistency requirement.

The appetite for growth management has expanded in recent years. In 1998 Tennessee passed a law requiring counties to adopt land-use plans that designate growth boundaries for existing municipalities and set aside rural preservation and "planned growth areas." If a county does not have a land use plan in place in eighteen months, it will lose access to some state infrastructure funds, including federal highway grants. In 2000, Pennsylvania enacted a Growing Smarter Law. The new law encourages land use coordination on the local, county and regional levels and allows state agencies to grant funding priority to localities that plan collaboratively. It allows localities to transfer development rights within and between municipalities to where development is desired.

Other states may follow suit within the near future. According to the American Planning Association, nearly one-third of the states, including non-coastal states like Colorado, Illinois and Michigan are pursuing major statewide planning reforms (American Planning Association, 2002).

Land Use Reforms/Land Acquisition

In recent years, an increasing number of state governments have been spending money to conserve land threatened by development and cleanup land in older communities. In 1998 ballot initiatives asked voters to approve bond measures or tax increases to preserve open space or acquire parks and wildlife habitats in Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, and Rhode Island. All passed except Georgia's and New Mexico's. New Jersey amended its constitution so that $1 billion over ten years will go to open space conservation efforts. Taken together, the voters in 1998 approved 72 percent of ballot measures to preserve open space and promote conservation entailing a commitment to spend $7.5 billion, directly or indirectly, to implement these measures.

The voters' actions continued through the 2000 election. In 2000, for example, Ohio voters approved a $400 million Clean Ohio Fund. The Fund represents a new style alignment between rural, urban and suburban interests. The Fund dedicates $200 million to the conservation and preservation of natural areas, open space and farmlands; another $200 million is targeted for the remediation of brownfields and the promotion of economic development (Myers and Puentes, 2001).

Infrastructure Spending

Maryland and New Jersey are in the vanguard of the movement to target direct spending and tax incentives to communities where infrastructure is already in place. In 1997 Maryland enacted laws to steer state road, sewer, and school monies away from farms and open spaces to "priority funding areas." Some are designated in the law--Baltimore and certain areas within the Baltimore and Washington beltways, for example. Counties may designate other areas if they meet certain guidelines. In 1998 New Jersey expanded on Maryland's approach; then Governor Christine Todd Whitman ordered state agencies to give preference to projects in areas where infrastructure was already in place.

Such smart growth policies do not stop development or repeal the operation of market forces; they simply control where the government chooses to spend its resources. According to Maryland's state planning director, smart growth policies repeal an "insidious form of entitlement--the idea that state government has an open-ended obligation, regardless of where you choose to build a house or open a business, to be there to build roads, schools, sewers" (Pierce, 1999).

Directing state infrastructure spending to older communities can have multiple benefits. By growing the residential and commercial base of existing communities, it can reduce fiscal disparities in a region and mitigate development pressure elsewhere. By placing emphasis on transportation policies that “fix it first”, it can leverage existing investments in infrastructure and realize substantial savings. It is estimated, for example, that containing growth in the Salt Lake City metropolis will save approximately $4.5 billion in transportation, water, sewer and utility investments (American Planning Association, 2002).

Tax Sharing

Since the 1970s, Minnesota has taken steps to reduce fiscal disparities arising from the uneven distribution of taxable real property among jurisdictions in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. Such disparities arise from fragmented governance and would not exist if a single government served the entire metropolitan area. The Minnesota fiscal disparities law works as follows: 40 percent of the increment to property tax revenues arising from the area’s commercial and industrial development is allocated to a metropolitan pool (Orfield, 1997). Funds in the pool – an estimated $314 million in 2002 – are then redistributed to communities in inverse proportion to net commercial tax capacity. Such redistribution makes economic sense since neighboring jurisdictions generally have to deal with such negative spillover effects of development as increased congestion but receive no tax benefit.

The Minnesota approach narrows, but does not eliminate, fiscal disparities, and it does not guarantee that jurisdictions with the highest expenditure needs (and highest poverty burden) receive funds from the regional pool. Growing suburbs continue to have 25-30 percent more tax base per household than do central cities and inner suburbs. Despite such difficulties, interest in metropolitan resource pooling has increased markedly over the past few years, primarily due to the work of Minnesota State Senator Myron Orfield. In 2000, for example, Connecticut authorized two or more municipalities to share property tax revenues. In January 2002, the California State Assembly passed a bill that would divide future sales tax growth in the six-county Sacramento region.

This 5-part smart growth agenda only represents the tip of the iceberg when it comes to state legislative and administrative efforts to curb sprawl and promote urban reinvestment. Many states are experimenting with efforts to stimulate redevelopment of older urban areas. New Jersey, for example, has adopted “smart codes” that place the renovation of existing buildings on a level playing field with new construction. Minnesota has passed "livable communities" legislation to provide greater incentives for balancing growth. Vermont has become a leader in downtown revitalization.

Finally, localities in many states are demanding that they be given the appropriate tools and powers to grow smarter. In North Carolina, Virginia and other states, localities are asking for a smart growth "toolbox" that would include the powers to carry out transit oriented development, inclusionary zoning, transfer of development rights and other alternative development strategies.

Regional and Local Reforms

While recognizing the critical role of state policy reforms, smart growth advocates are also trying to make substantial changes in their own backyards. The nation abounds with examples of smart growth efforts that are designed to affect the pace, shape and quality of growth at the metropolitan and local level.

Some examples:

- Across the country, corporate and civic groups are leading visioning efforts to chart alternative growth patterns for their regions. In Chicago, for example, the Commercial Club, an organization of top regional business leaders, has released the Chicago Metropolis 2020 report, an ambitious plan for meeting that area's myriad growth challenges in the coming decades.

- New constituencies and coalitions are being formed to promote smart growth and urban reinvestment. In Ohio, for example, elected officials from inner suburbs around Cleveland have formed the Northeastern Ohio First Suburbs Consortium to discuss the common strengths, needs and problems of these distinct places. The Consortium has initiated major cooperative projects that address economic development and housing renovation by collaborating with each other and sharing resources (Puentes and Orfield, 2002).

- Empowered by changes in federal transportation law, some metropolitan planning organizations ("MPOs") are using their new power to design and implement transportation plans that go beyond traditional road building at the fringe. MPOs in Chattanooga, Portland, and St. Louis are choosing to repair existing infrastructure and invest in mass transit rather than to build more roads. MPOs in Philadelphia, St. Louis and Kansas City have become regional leaders in describing the implications of unbalanced growth (e.g., inner suburban decline) and identifying possible solutions.

- Advocates and voters are using the ballot box to advance efforts to preserve open space or build and maintain parks. In the 2000 elections, voters approved 201 of the 257 open space measures that were on the ballot, a 78 percent approval rate. This represented a 15 percent increase in this type of measure from 1998 and a significant increase in the approval rate. Open space measures were on ballots in every region of the country, but the greatest number was found in the Northeast (Myers and Puentes, 2001).

- In virtual revolt over congested roads, overcrowded schools, and loss of open space, citizens of outer suburban communities of such fast-growing metropolitan areas as northern Virginia and Seattle have pushed county governments to increase developer fees and scale back existing plans for residential growth.

The Challenges to Metropolitan Thinking and Smart Growth

The smart growth achievements of the past half-decade have been remarkable in their scope and potential. Across the country, new coalitions are being formed, legislative reforms are being pursued, and attractive, more compact forms of urban and suburban living are being demonstrated.

Yet the jury is still out on whether smart growth, as currently defined and implemented, can have a measurable impact on the pace of decentralization and the geographic scale of urbanization in the United States. In many states and regions, the smart growth agenda is still defined in fairly narrow terms, usually around small land preservation and acquisition efforts. To be truly successful, smart growth will need to address at least five distinct challenges in the coming years.

Smart growth needs to address the spatial distribution of affordable housing

To date, few smart growth coalitions have incorporated affordable housing issues into their reform agendas. In fact, some exurban communities have inappropriately used the smart growth banner to justify the exclusion of affordable housing within their jurisdictions.

Yet the spatial distribution of affordable housing plays a central role in shaping metropolitan growth patterns. One reason that low-income families live in city neighborhoods of concentrated poverty is that there is almost no affordable housing elsewhere. This is partly because subsidized housing tends to be located in distressed inner city neighborhoods and partly because wealthier suburbs practice exclusionary zoning and limit affordable housing within their borders.

A smart growth agenda needs to expand housing opportunities for middle-class families in the city and close-in suburbs while creating more affordable housing near job centers. Working in concert, regional elected leaders should balance the housing market through zoning changes, subsidies, school reforms and tax incentives so that all families – both middle class and low income – have more choice about whether they live and how to be closer to jobs. Regions need to stimulate the production and preservation of affordable housing for working families in suburban communities.

A smart housing agenda will require significant policy reforms at all levels of government. To make it easier to build housing in older communities, cities will need to reexamine and revise local zoning rules for downtown areas – as well as commercial and even industrial areas in cities and older suburbs. To make it easier to rehabilitate older buildings, states and localities will need to change their building codes. To make it easier to renovate older homes, particularly in the inner suburban areas of the region, the cities, older counties and the states need to consider special loan funds – like the ones created in Minnesota, Cuyahoga County and Cook County. To make it easier to increase densities, states should permit – and localities should adopt – programs that allow the transfer of development rights from greenfields to urban communities. To make it easier to build smaller apartments, the federal and state governments may need to provide greater access to market capital through new credit enhancement vehicles.

New affordable housing, of course, will need to be built in fast growing areas where jobs are increasingly concentrated. That will also require a change in rules. The federal and state governments should consider, for example, targeting the allocation of low income housing tax credits to areas of growing employment, not only to areas of distress and poverty. In addition, fast growing counties should consider adopting inclusionary zoning ordinances that require a portion of all major subdivision developments to be affordable to low and moderate income renters. Excellent examples include ordinances in counties like Montgomery County in Maryland, Fairfax County in Virginia and King County in Washington State (Brown, 2001).

Smart growth needs to adapt to regional diversity

Smart growth is focused, first and foremost, on changing the basic laws and practices that govern growth patterns in 50 states and thousands of local jurisdictions. Smart growth will, therefore, need to be fought for simultaneously in multiple legislative arenas around the country. The success of smart growth will ultimately depend on its adaptation to the unique political cultures, market realities and developmental trends of a diverse country.

States and metropolitan areas differ in multiple ways. First, there are stark state and regional differences in growth patterns. As Bill Fulton and Rolf Pendall have shown, many metropolitan areas in the Northeast and Midwest – Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Milwaukee – are growing slowly in population but rapidly in urbanized land. By contrast, Southeastern metropolitan areas – Charlotte, Nashville, and Atlanta – are characterized by rapid population growth, and even more rapid growth in land consumption. Yet many Western metropolitan areas – Las Vegas, Phoenix, Los Angeles – are actually experiencing increases in land density while accommodating large amounts of population growth (Fulton, et. al., 2001).

These regional differences in growth patterns confound conventional wisdom about "who sprawls most" in the United States. As Fulton and Pendall have written, "It is especially significant to note that the goal of efficient land utilization is being achieved in one region of the country that is commonly perceived to be sprawling – the West – but not in those parts of the nation that are commonly perceived not to have a sprawl problem – the Northeast and the Midwest." Several factors – significant environmental and regulatory barriers to growth in the West, the different patterns of federal ownership of land in the United States – account for this regional diversity in development patterns.

Second, states differ on the level of governmental fragmentation and (a related point) the extent of power that is devolved to local jurisdictions. In many states, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest, there are literally hundreds of localities in a metropolitan area, each one vested with the power to make critical decisions over land use, zoning and taxation. In other states (particularly in the south), there are (perhaps) 5 to 10 counties in a given metropolitan area. Many of these county governments have weak powers and are required to “ask permission” of the state legislature before pursuing innovative smart growth efforts (e.g., public transit extension, inclusionary zoning, transfer of development rights, etc.).

Finally, the political foundation for smart growth is highly uneven around the country. In states like Maryland and Oregon, organizations like the Chesapeake Bay Foundation or the 1000 Friends of Oregon have a long institutional history and reflect the environmental interests of many residents and voters. In other states, however, environmental and conservation organizations are relatively new, poorly staffed and not as powerful.

These differences in regional growth patterns, governmental fragmentation and political organization set the basic context for smart growth responses and, by necessity, require different approaches. The success of smart growth will depend ultimately on the ability of political leaders and advocates to tailor solutions to the distinct conditions of the regions in which they operate.

Smart growth needs to engage more systemic reforms at federal level

To date, the smart growth movement has focused the bulk of its attention on state, regional and local reforms. Yet, as discussed above, federal policies also play an important role in shaping growth patterns by facilitating exurban sprawl and concentrating poverty in central cities. A federal smart growth agenda must, therefore, be defined and implemented.

Some positive changes did occur in the past decade. Federal transportation laws in the early and late 1990s supported smart growth efforts by (1) devolving greater responsibility to metropolitan entities; (2) giving state and regional decisionmakers the flexibility to use highway funds for transit purposes; and (3) directly funding alternative transportation strategies. Under the Clinton Administration, enforcement of the Clean Air Act and Endangered Species Act compelled various regions (e.g., Atlanta) to pursue alternatives to conventional sprawl-inducing activities. Public housing reforms led to the demolition of the most troubled projects in the country and promoted economic integration and “new urbanist” design in new developments. Federal ownership of lands in western states often curb excessive decentralization by acting as de facto urban growth boundaries.

Yet much more needs to be done. The federal government should continue its reform efforts in the transportation arena. More power and responsibility should be devolved to metropolitan planning organizations, which are closer to the transportation challenges faced by metropolitan areas. Federal transportation funds should also be used in metropolitan areas almost exclusively for the repair and maintenance of existing highways and for the expansion of alternative transportation strategies that relieve congestion and promote more balanced growth patterns. Federal funds should be used to build new highways in metropolitan and adjoining areas only in exceptional circumstances.

The federal government should also consider extending metropolitan governance beyond the transportation arena. Metropolitan-wide administration makes sense in areas like housing, work force and economic development. The federal government should, in particular, shift governance of the housing voucher program to the metropolitan level. Such consolidation would make it easier for low-income voucher recipients to exercise choice in the metropolitan housing market (Katz and Turner, 2001).

The federal government should use the tax code to invest smartly. Federal homeownership tax incentives should be expanded to boost homeownership in areas where homeownership rates lag far behind the national average. Such incentives would enhance the ability of working families to build equity and contribute to the stability of neighborhoods by lowering the costs of homeownership. Such incentives would also expand the incentives for the production of affordable housing, either through new building or renovation of existing homes (Retsinas and Belsky, 2000).

Finally, the federal government has an important role to play as a provider of demographic, market and programmatic information. The federal government should provide metropolitan areas with a clear spatial analysis of how federal resources are allocated. The Department of Commerce, for example, should show the extent to which individual jurisdictions in major metropolitan areas benefit from federal procurement decisions. The Department of Transportation should, likewise, annually display the spatial distribution of federal transportation dollars in states and metropolitan areas. Disclosure of federal spending patterns is not an onerous burden; in fact, it will subject federal bureaucracies to the same standards that now govern private institutions like banks and thrifts. The Home Mortgage Disclosure Act requires every depository institution to disclose their lending patterns by race, space and income. If the federal government can require banks to disclose where they lend, why can't the federal government require bureaucracies to disclose where they spend?

Smart growth will depend on city reform

Smart growth requires metropolitan areas to focus intently on density in housing and more clustering in office, retail, and commercial and residential spaces. Yet many newer suburbs remain opposed to such changes in land use patterns. If smart growth is to succeed, therefore, central cities and older suburbs will need to become places of choice for businesses and residents. That will require cities to alter their relationship with the market economy and enact substantial reforms in local policies and practices.

Despite signs of urban renaissance and renewal, cities still remain difficult places to do business. Basic information that drives market activity (e.g., who has title to land) is rarely available in a transparent manner. Multiple city bureaucracies often have overlapping responsibilities for related activities (e.g., the acquisition and disposition of vacant properties). Instead of streamlining city government and creating a climate for business investment, most cities have pursued a fairly narrow vision of urban policy. They have spent most of the past decade building the Consumer City, focusing on downtown revitalization, stadia building, and convention center expansions and hotel development. While these strategies have generated sales tax revenues and helped change the image of the city, they have not generated the kind of high wage job base that is critical to long-term economic vitality.

The Brookings Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy has identified five competitive strategies that urban leaders can pursue to substantially improve the economic, fiscal and social health of their core economies. First, cities need to fix the basics that determine business and residential location. These fundamentals include such elements as good schools, safe streets, competitive taxes, efficient services and a transparent and effective system for the redevelopment of land and infrastructure.

Second, cities need to build on their assets and play in the real economy. These assets generally include fixed institutions (e.g., universities, hospitals), other urban employment clusters, downtown business districts, cultural and recreational areas and waterfront locations.

Third, cities need to create quality neighborhoods. Such places are livable and distinctive and offer a range of housing, transportation, commercial and recreational choices to low-, moderate- and middle-income families.

Fourth, cities need to reward work and build family wealth. For many city residents, the income from work is simply not sufficient to cover the costs of housing, health care, childcare, transportation and other necessities of daily living.

Finally, cities need to influence metropolitan growth. Cities can do this both through the local actions defined above (which make them more competitive places for businesses and families) and through advocating change in state and federal policies that facilitate sprawl and economic decentralization.

City reform efforts, of course, will not come easy. They will require sustained efforts by local coalitions of corporate, civic, political and community leaders. They will require reforms that are tailored to the political, market and demographic realities of different cities. Yet, in many respects, the success of smart growth depends on whether cities can "get their act together" and once again become places where large numbers of businesses decide to locate and people choose to live.

Smart growth must recognize the central role of race

As discussed above, race continues to play a central role in shaping metropolitan growth patterns in the United States. Race has fundamentally influenced the policies of exclusion that are practiced by suburbs throughout the country. These policies have exacerbated the concentration of racial poverty in the central cities and helped construct the metropolitan dividing lines that separate areas of wealth and opportunity from areas of poverty and distress. As John Powell has written, "Concentrated poverty should be understood as racial and economic segregation combined. It is the segregation of poor people of color from opportunity and resources" (Powell, 1999).

In the past, the racial divide was perceived as affecting only the central city and close in suburbs. Yet the racial divide has also placed enormous pressures on growing counties. In many respects, sprawl is the inevitable flip side of racial segregation and social exclusion. Race shapes growth patterns and drives business and residential decisions in ways that no single other factor can match.

Bridging the racial divide will require leadership, vision and courage on the part of key constituencies. Smart growth advocates, for example, will need to move beyond the relatively "safe ground" of open space acquisition, environmental protection and infrastructure investment. If they are serious about curbing sprawl, they will need to embrace and push fundamental changes in regional housing policies, against the opposition of many suburban citizens.

Yet African American leaders also need to come to the regional table and advocate for progressive metropolitan solutions. With a few exceptions (Denver Mayor Wellington Webb, Rochester Mayor Bill Johnson, King County Executive Ron Sims), most black elected officials do not lead or even participate much in smart growth conversations at the metropolitan or state level. The absence of the traditional civil rights community from smart growth discussions is even more pronounced. As John Powell has written, many African American leaders remain highly suspicious of metropolitan efforts (Powell, 2000). That suspicion may date back to efforts to consolidate cities and counties in the 1970s, but it is an impediment to political coalition building that needs to be addressed.

Racial divisions in the United States, of course, will not be solved overnight. But progress on metropolitan issues like transportation, housing, fiscal disparities and economic investment will mitigate the divisions in substantial ways. In the end, the smart growth agenda is the first effort in years that offers an alternative vision to development patterns that have isolated the racial poor and undermined the economic and fiscal vitality of cities and inner suburbs.

Conclusion

The smart growth movement has the potential to change the landscape of metropolitan America and, in the process, build stronger cities, sustainable regions and more inclusive communities. It has the power to unite formerly disparate constituencies – environmentalists, land conservationists, farm preservationists, community development advocates, downtown business interests – into a strong, sustainable force for change. It has the ability to build new kinds of political coalitions that cross-parochial borders and move beyond current racial and ethnic divisions.

In many respects, smart growth is a movement whose time has come. The changing demographics of the country, the restructuring of the market economy, the rise of congestion, the backlash to excessive suburbanization – all support the desire for a different pattern of growth, a different ethos about growth, than the one that has dominated the American landscape since the end of the second world war.

Yet the smart growth movement is in its infancy. The movement's success will not be measured by what laws it enacts or energy it galvanizes in a three or five or even ten-year period. The reshaping of

American metropolitan areas will be an activity that spans decades and generations – just as the current pattern of sprawl has played out over the last half century. This is the true “permanent campaign” in America that will require persistence, discipline and courage.

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