Realizing GRTA's Potential: Lessons from Around the Country

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Executive Summary

The Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) is charting a new course both for the region and for regional governance in the United States. The new GRTA Board and staff are creating a new institution even as they try to untangle the knot of air pollution, traffic, and sprawl that is snarling Atlanta's economy and quality of life. No agency exists in the United States that is quite like GRTA, so the Board has few models to follow. But some agencies around the country do share common traits with GRTA, and this paper presents several case studies that show some of the pitfalls as well as the potential for GRTA's new charge.

The first case study is a cautionary tale from Los Angeles, of a mega agency that was formed to solve regional transportation problems but instead became a problem in itself, a vast failure universally reviled in Southern California. The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority was supposed to plan and operate the Los Angeles transit system, including a huge bus system and a sparkling new rail network. The agency is mired in huge cost overruns, and lost a major lawsuit brought by bus riders who charged that the MTA let the bus lines deteriorate in favor of rail. As a result, Los Angeles remains a city without either effective bus or rail service.

The Metropolitan Council in Minneapolis/St. Paul tells a story of the great potential invested in a region-wide agency. But in many ways this potential has yet to be realized, even 30 years after the Council's creation. Like GRTA, the Met Council is appointed by the Governor and oversees transportation and land use issues in the Twin Cities. Its power rises and falls with the interest and attention of the Governor. As a result, early success gave way to a long period of political insignificance, while unplanned growth prevailed. However, the Council's fortunes appear to be on the rise again, and its structure presents several lessons for GRTA.

We also review two examples of agencies that have created structures that maintain local government control and respect even as they promote smarter growth and transportation planning. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission of the San Francisco Bay Area has initiated a points system and a grants program that are nudging local government toward new transportation priorities, while Maryland's Smart Growth Program bases state investment decisions on the best use of existing infrastructure and on preserving the state's agricultural heritage.

Recommendations

Based on these case studies, STPP recommends that GRTA take several steps to plan for smart growth. GRTA should look beyond simple conformity to clean air laws and confront congestion and air quality in a real way. It should set accountability standards for reaching new air quality, transportation and equity goals, and should adopt a comprehensive smart growth strategy. It should also provide local governments with technical and financial assistance as they begin to coordinate transportation and land use planning.

Equally important, GRTA must create a structure for success. The agency should clearly define its relationships with its primary partners in the region, GDOT and the ARC, with Memoranda of Agreement. These Memoranda should spell out GRTA's expectations for the way transportation dollars are programmed, and can be the starting point for innovation in the region. GRTA should also make public involvement one of its prime missions, and regular, ongoing public outreach and involvement should be a hallmark of its work.

GRTA certainly has its work cut out for it. But with careful planning and clear expectations, it could help Atlanta once again turn around its fortunes and become a city leading the way for the South and the rest of the nation.

Introduction

The Atlanta region, once the forward looking hub of the New South, has come to be characterized as a metropolitan area mired in congestion, air pollution and bureaucracy. The region's persistent air quality and traffic problems have lessened the desirability of the region for business and have led to a deterioration of quality of life for the region's three plus million inhabitants. The region continues to violate air pollution standards set by the federal government to protect public health, and has been sued by environmental and environmental justice groups. The Georgia Department of Transportation, despite the fact that history has proven that more roads only exacerbate the region's transportation and air quality problems, persists in proposing new and expanded highways.

Georgia's new elected governor, the Honorable Roy Barnes, has done something about this lamentable state of affairs. With laudable alacrity, Governor Barnes has stepped up to the table to propose and shepherd through the legislature a new authority to deal with transportation and air quality problems in Georgia's air quality non-attainment regions. Governor Barnes proposal, introduced into the Georgia Senate as SB57, was quickly passed by the legislature and signed into law. It responded to calls for reform from groups as diverse as the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and the Sierra Club. Make no mistake about it; the Governor's creation of the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority is a big step forward. It can break the bureaucratic logjams and agency obstructionism that have prevented the region from taking the steps it needs to solve its transportation, sprawl and air pollution problems, which are at the heart of its problems with regional competitiveness.

It is within this context of enthusiastic endorsement; then, that this paper seeks to analyze the structure and potential of GRTA and suggest some next steps that the Governor and the newly appointed GRTA board and staff can take to move the region forward. We have looked at similar efforts around the country to learn what lessons we can from the experience of others. These case studies suggest some cautions for the new agency, as it begins its challenging work. Finally we have proposed that GRTA enter into an exciting new partnership with the private for-profit and non-profit sectors to plan a more livable and competitive future for the region.

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Figure One
SUMMARY OF SENATE BILL 57

CREATION OF THE GEORGIA REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

Purpose
- Manage air quality and transportation within designated areas of the State

Applicable area
- Currently the thirteen-county Atlanta air quality nonattainment area; may be extended to other areas as they become designated as nonattainment areas

Governance
- Fifteen-member board appointed by the Governor for four-year terms and subject to removal by the Governor under certain circumstances
- Authorized to appoint an executive director and staff
- Board also will serve as the Governor's Development Council, which has authority to coordinate planning and development among state agencies
- DOT, DNR, other state agencies, and local governments are required to cooperate with the authority. Local governments may lose state funds for failure to cooperate.

Powers and Duties
- Plan, design, construct, lease, operate, manage, and maintain public transportation systems and air quality control installations and contract with other entities, public and private, for such services
- Participate in and coordinate planning for transportation and air quality purposes among all state, regional, and local authorities and adopt a regional plan
- Review plans for the region prepared by the ARC and DOT, negotiate revisions, and approve the plans (2/3 vote required)
- Review and approve projects planned by region by Georgia Rail Passenger Authority and Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority (GEFA) (2/3 vote required)
- Review and approve developments of regional impact as a prerequisite to expenditure of state transportation funds (may be overridden by ¾ vote of host jurisdiction governing body)
- Set targets for air quality improvements and standards
- Make grants or loans to local governments
- Acquire property through eminent domain

Available Funding Sources
- Revenue bonds and guaranteed revenue bonds on its own or through GEFA
- Appropriations from General Assembly; loans, loan guarantees, and grants from federal and state governments or other sources
- Special district tax funds (after enactment of tax by local government)
- Federal funds for transportation, transit, air quality improvement, and other congestion and air quality purposes

[Source Greater Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, January, 1999}

Essentially, the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority becomes a super agency for the metropolitan area, with a jurisdiction larger than either the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) or the Metropolitan Atlanta Regional Transportation Authority (MARTA). It will have substantial powers, but does not supplant or replace any of the existing agencies charged with transportation and air quality, such as the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), the ARC and MARTA.

1. Public Transit: GRTA may, but is not required to, build and operate mass transit at the local or regional level. It does not replace MARTA, but it is empowered, as MARTA is not, to undertake mass transit in the region's outlying counties. It can directly operate transit or contract for its operation.
2. Transportation Planning and Programming: While GRTA is not responsible for developing and adopting a regional transportation plan, it is charged with reviewing, negotiating improvements in, and approving (by a 2/3 vote) regional plans developed by the Atlanta Regional Commission and the Georgia DOT for the 13 county region. It has similar responsibility for reviewing and approving the regional transportation improvement plan, which is the programming document for federal transportation funds. It also is charged with coordinating planning activities for transportation and air quality.
3. Powers: In addition to those powers enumerated above, GRTA can issue debt, take property through eminent domain, approve developments of regional impact, collect taxes (if approved by local jurisdictions), and apply for and use federal and state transportation and air quality funds to accomplish its duties. GRTA serves as the Governor's Development Council.
4. Governance: GRTA is governed by a fifteen-member board, all of whom are appointed by the Governor. There is no provision for citizen involvement or review and no specifications as to the make-up of the Board.

GRTA is thus not primarily an operating agency, although it is empowered to operate mass transit. It is not a planning and programming agency, although it clearly has the whip hand in approving and calling for changes in the plans of others, including GDOT and the ARC. It is also not principally a fundraising agency, as its power to raise taxes or collect state or federal revenues depends upon the approval of other agencies. It is an agency with the power to say "no" and therein lies the enormous strength of the GRTA proposal. It also has the option of saying "yes" to a new and expanded transit system, and to a new direction for Atlanta's growth and development.

Case Studies From Around the Country

In an attempt to chart both the challenges and opportunities for the new Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, STPP made four case studies of agencies created by state legislative mandate to tackle transportation problems at the metropolitan or larger scale. Each of these initiatives involves the creation of a governance structure by legislative action, although the response varied widely. In Los Angeles, the approach taken was consolidation of all transportation functions into a super agency governed by local elected officials. In Minneapolis, the approach has been the creation of a regional planning body appointed by the Governor, and the gradual accumulation of powers, responsibilities and operating functions to that agency. The San Francisco Bay Area example is of a regional transportation funding and planning agency empowered by the legislature but governed by local elected officials appointed locally. In Maryland, the Maryland Smart Growth program sought to use the power of state subsidies to direct and manage growth. Each of these disparate examples provides equally disparate lessons for the new GRTA to consider as it begins its ambitious task.

Mega Agencies: A Cautionary Tale from Los Angeles

Government goes through cycles of centralization and decentralization, and the California Legislature led the trend to resolve sticky problems by building mega-agencies in the merger-and-acquisition-crazy ‘80s. But the monolithic Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority it created has once again proved the old saw that bigger isn't necessarily better. The agency's much-publicized failure to solve transportation problems in Los Angeles have prompted some to conclude that public transit cannot and will not work in a sprawled-out metropolitan region that is as stubbornly dependent on the automobile as Southern California. But that is, of course, an analysis that does nothing to solve the region's persistent air quality and congestion problems.

Few transportation agencies have been as publicly reviled as the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The butt of jokes in the national press and on city streets, its board meetings a circus sideshow replete with TV crews, protesters and screaming matches between board members, the agency's demise has long been predicted. But while numerous attempts to reform the MTA have been mounted by federal transportation officials, the state Legislature, the courts, the agency's bus riders, and even its own board members, no one can seem to agree on what's wrong or how to fix it.

“What absolutely everyone does agree on is that the MTA is terrible,” says Bill Mabie, an aide to state Sen. Richard Polanco, who has over the past four years authored numerous bills to change the MTA's governing structure. “But there is no consensus — none — on what to do about it. We've given up trying.” Adds Joel Bellman, an aide to MTA board member and L.A. County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, “There's not even a compromise consensus on what to do about the agency.”

That is why, Bellman says, Yaroslavsky took an MTA reform measure straight to county voters last November, putting on the ballot an initiative to prevent the MTA from using local sales tax revenues to build any more subways. “Everyone said the initiative was a meat axe, a blunt instrument, that we were throwing out the baby with the bathwater. But the Supervisor had spent a year cajoling, threatening and warning other board members that this was the only solution to the agency's fiscal problems.”

The firestorm of criticism from both within and without the agency has been prompted by the fact that the MTA hasn't been able to provide L.A. and the 88 other sprawling cities in L.A. County with a transportation system that meets the needs of its 20 million residents, many of whom are transit-dependent. This despite the fact that the agency — with an annual budget of nearly $3 billion, more than a third of which comes from local sales tax measures — is one of the most well-endowed transportation agencies in the country, and was until recently the recipient of the lion's share of federal "new starts" funding.

Ten years into a glorious 30-year plan that promised "a rail line to the door of every politician," to quote former MTA financial executive Tom Rubin, the agency has built just over half of the 400-mile urban and commuter rail system it had promised residents of L.A. County, for a total cost of about $6 billion. And the agency has completely run out of money.

It's no wonder. The rail lines that have been built have tipped the scales as the most expensive ever constructed: The Blue Line to Long Beach, which was to have cost $125 million, and the Green Line from Norwalk to El Segundo, which was to have cost $179 million, each cost nearly $1 billion. The not-yet-completed subway system is penciling out at an exorbitant $330 million a mile. And the partly built Blue Line to Pasadena is no bargain either at $65 million a mile for a projected total cost of $800 million. In an indication of just how low the MTA's credibility has sunk, the state Legislature took the Blue Line away from the MTA last year and gave it over to an independent construction authority, after new MTA CEO Julian Burke put the project on hold due to the agency's financial problems.

Meantime the agency's gigantic 2,300-bus system has languished, with service cutbacks, fare increases, and so much overcrowding that bus riders joined together in a lawsuit charging the agency with racism. The Bus Riders Union contends that construction of the rail system - which when built out was going to serve only 20 percent of all transit riders in sprawled-out L.A. County — was cannibalizing the bus system that served a heavily minority ridership. Federal District Court Judge Terrence Hatter did not dismiss their contention.

The Consent Decree that resulted from court-ordered negotiations was designed to force the MTA to deliver better bus service and indeed it did halt the precipitous decline in service — resulting in the purchase of new buses to replaced the agency's aged fleet as well as the provision of a reasonably priced monthly bus pass and generally better service standards. But critics question whether the Consent Decree hasn't prescribed the wrong solution to the problem of how to provide L.A. with an effective public transportation system, and say it is forcing the MTA to adhere to standards that no other bus operator in the world could meet. Worse, the ensuing bus versus rail debate has pitted public transit advocates against each other and resulted in so much acrimony, rhetoric and posturing on the part of board members that any consensus on the agency's mission or regional vision has long since evaporated.

There are plenty of doomsayers who believe it's only a matter of time before the MTA ends up in receivership. "The MTA has an uncanny ability to ignore the fact that it faces huge costs," says Tom Rubin, once chief financial officer at the MTA and now an expert witness in the Bus Riders Union lawsuit. "But it's not going to be able to ignore the Consent Decree."

Adds MTA lobbyist and former L.A. County transportation commissioner Barna Szabo, "The situation has deteriorated to the point that the MTA is an agency that's run by special investigations, with a fiscal policy that's set by the Consent Decree. But the biggest tragedy is that support for public transit has been eroded, and Los Angeles is going to be the only major city in the world without a viable public transit system. L.A.'s Harbor Commission and the Airport Commission have both had their share of problems but no one doubts the importance of a viable, vibrant harbor or airport. Public transit is at least as important. If L.A. doesn't have a working system the city will choke on its own traffic."

People trace the beginning of the end all the way back to the beginning. When the half-cent sales tax called Proposition A was passed in 1980 and the second half-cent sales tax, Proposition C, was passed in 1990, the MTA was two separate agencies: The L.A. County Transportation Commission was responsible for planning and programming transportation funding in L.A. County, and the Rapid Transit District was responsible for transit operations. The runaway operating costs of the RTD's countywide bus system had long been a source of contention between the two agencies, resulting in much bad press over service cutbacks and fare hikes, and increasing pressure from politicians to do something about the problem.

The solution imposed by the state Legislature in 1992 was to cobble together the two agencies, a tactic that seemed to be working in nearby Orange County. "The Legislature didn't really want to solve the problem so much as they wanted it to go away, to keep it out of the papers," says former MTA official Rubin. Doug Carter of Booz Allen Hamilton, a consulting firm that worked on the MTA merger as well as on similar mergers in Orange and San Diego counties and in Chicago, says he's still not sure exactly what went wrong, but admits, "If I knew then what I know now I may not have pushed so hard for the merger."

Orange County Transportation Authority consultant Monte Ward says there are several reasons the merger worked for OCTA and not for the MTA, but that the biggest is that both Proposition A and C had passed in L.A. County with a simple majority vote, without any structured plan for the use of the tax revenues, and without a sunset clause. The result, he says, was that the new agency was flooded "with easy money," and the man who headed the LACTC and who was campaigning to head the new agency, Neil Peterson, was able to design a "grandiose plan" to improve public transit, promising things the agency could not in the end deliver.

Exacerbating the problem was that the economy in Southern California “went south” beginning in 1990 for a sustained downturn, with a severe impact on the local sales tax revenues that provided the agency with so much of its budget. “The people working in the financial department were far too optimistic and they appeared to be afraid to go to board members and tell them the agency was in trouble,” says Carter. “The merger was difficult because of both the politics and the personalities involved. But the financial problems would have caught up with the agency even if there hadn’t been a merger.”

Neither did it help that there was so much bad blood between the agencies, or that no staff was cut at either the RTD, which for several years remained housed in a crowded and windowless office building just off Skid Row, or at the LACTC, which continued to rent expansive office space in an upscale building several blocks away. As a result there was a great deal of institutional resistance to the merger, prompting power struggles that helped fuel the bus versus rail debate.

All staff is now housed together in an opulent high-rise critics have dubbed the “Taj Mahal,” which the MTA built on the eastern edge of the city. But the animosity persists even today, as best evidenced by a lively website that traffics in scandalous MTA gossip and which is reputedly maintained by a bitter, anonymous, former RTD staffer.

“I always say you can’t move too fast or too far with a merger,” says OCTA’s Ward. “Because you need to create a new corporate culture in order to move forward. In L.A. that never happened.”

The politics of the board — which consists of the five L.A. County Supervisors, the mayor of the City of Los Angeles and his three appointees, four representatives from the smaller cities in L.A. County, and a non-voting member appointed by the governor — have never been very pretty either. “It’s a collection of regional and parochial interests who engage in the worst kind of log-rolling,” says an aide to one MTA board member. “Part of the problem is that the people on the board were all elected for other reasons — they’re either city council people or county supervisors — and they will never be held accountable for their role with this agency.

“Every decision degenerates into internecine squabbling about projects not policy, and any effort at consensus is held hostage to the tiniest dissenting faction. Everyone hates the City of L.A. — which with its four votes is the 800-pound gorilla on the board — so the smaller cities and the county will band together against L.A. Or else the cities will all band together against the county. I don’t know if the flaw is in the conception or in the execution. But I do know it’s a Gordian knot, though that’s an overused metaphor when describing the MTA’s problems.”

It doesn’t help that the capital-intensive nature of the rail investment, together with its downtown focus, runs counter to land use and investment patterns that have caused new development to occur not downtown but on the far fringes of the county. The rail system was not built fast enough to counter urban sprawl by focusing and attracting investment and development downtown, and the more expensive urban rail lines will never serve outlying taxpayers.

This lack of a regional perspective and plan prompts some people to suggest that the LACTC and RTD should never have been merged, and that the solution to the current problems may be for the MTA to devolve back into an agency that focuses more on regional planning and programming and that contracts out for services which can increasingly be provided by municipal providers. In L.A. County there are 40 service providers that receive funding from the MTA — compared to Orange County where there is only one besides OCTA, and San Diego, where there are several — which means that the MTA more than most agencies must serve as an effective regional coordinator.

The Southern California Association of Governments is the metropolitan planning organization in Southern California, serving an area larger than Indiana with a population greater than that of 47 states. But whereas passage of ISTEA (the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) in 1991 provided MPOs nationwide with greatly enhanced authority over the selection of projects for federal funding, California state law allowed the county transportation commissions in Southern California to continue to do most of their own transportation planning and programming — relegating SCAG to the role of coordinator. The county transportation commissions also have the power to generate their own-source funding. And whereas SCAG encourages the development of policy on an array of regional issues including growth management, all authority over land use resides at the local level.

This arrangement has diminished the regional nature of the decision-making process, and some observers point to the Bay Area MPO, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), as a model that works better. MTC was created in part because of concerns over problems of coordination and rivalry among the area's numerous transit providers. It is a considerably more active participant in the programming of transportation funds, serving as a separate regional planning and programming agency that funds and coordinates transit service wholly provided by other entities. MTC, however, like SCAG and the MTA, is limited in its ability to tie transportation investments to land use decisions.

"MTC has a plan and organizes its resources so that it can achieve that plan," says one former staffer who asked to remain anonymous. "MTC does an objective analysis about the fundability of the different options. It operates within financial constraints. It's a partnership that is able to operate with a regional perspective instead of parochial interests, that is accountable, and that is able to be much more responsive to local conditions and customers than a monolithic agency like the MTA. And it's an arrangement that allows MTC to pressure each of its service providers for efficiencies."

Others agree that what's been missing at the MTA since the merger is a system of checks and balances that acknowledges financial constraints and provides accountability. "That's what you have at the MTC, and what we used to have when the LACTC functioned as the oversight agency," says Jim Sims, who served as the LACTC's deputy director and now works for the Southern California Association of Governments, the agency responsible for planning in the six-county region. "Sure the LACTC and the RTD were always fighting, and the L.A. Times was always full of stories about it. But it was all a part of the process of keeping the process honest. It was a creative tension that led to a better transit system. Not to mention the fact that it helped keep costs down."

Operating costs have always been "a fiscal Pacman," in the words of one MTA observer, that have devoured revenues since the beginning — a fact that was obscured by the merger of the two agencies, the sudden influx of Prop A and C dollars, and the much publicized lawsuit by the Bus Riders Union. The Bus Riders and a legion of other very vocal critics have blamed the agency's financial woes on cronyism and corruption in the rail contracting process, and indeed these have been persistent problems resulting in enormous cost overruns and much bad media. However, the resulting furor has turned attention away from other very real problems, including unfavorable labor agreements, operating inefficiencies and other management problems that have inflated the cost of bus operations.

Many MTA observers say the fact that the MTA has its own in-house bus operations division — and one that's always running over budget — is a clear conflict of interest with the agency's role as programmer of funds for the other bus operators in L.A. County.

"It's such a waste for the municipal operators to have to travel to Washington to lobby for funding and to try to prove that we are more efficient and worthy than the MTA when the MTA is also traveling to Washington and arguing that they are more deserving than we are," says John Catoe, who heads up the very popular Big Blue Bus in Santa Monica. "We could both save so much in lobbying dollars and staff time if we joined together in a regional coalition."

This inherent conflict of interest in the MTA's role also causes the agency to short-change other investments in the countywide transportation system. "Bike and pedestrian projects will never be given significant funding when the agency is so hard-pressed to find money to support its own operations division and rail construction projects," says Mark Pisano, executive director of the Southern California Association of Governments. "Of course their priority is going to be to fund the services they are responsible for providing.

"The fundamental problem was that the agency didn't have any control over costs to begin with, so when it was put in charge of programming all county transportation funding it was like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse. Add to that the fact that rail construction is enormously expensive, and the result is the situation that the MTA now finds itself in."

But former MTA financial executive Tom Rubin is among those who vehemently disagree that bus operations costs are the source of the MTA's problems. "Blaming bus operating costs is like blaming the Johnstown flood on a leaking toilet in Altoona," says Rubin, adding, "Bus operations has probably come in five percent over budget every year the MTA has been in existence, but rail construction costs have come in 500 percent over budget. So I strongly disagree that we should first look to bus operations in order to solve the agency's problems."

If the merger of all transportation functions — planning and programming, construction and operations — and so many diverse and competing interests under one roof at the MTA was a disaster waiting to happen, some would say it is equally inevitable that the MTA will end up returning to its role as a regional planning and programming agency, divesting itself of much of its operations and rail construction. As long as the agency remains obsessed with the letting of lucrative rail construction contracts on the one hand, and preoccupied with the ensuing bus versus rail debate and fiscal crisis on the other, any kind of rational planning will be impossible.

The state Legislature has already taken construction of the Blue Line light rail line to Pasadena away from the agency and handed it over to a new joint powers rail construction authority. And because of the voter initiative, authored by MTA board member and L.A. County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, that prevents the MTA from spending any local sales tax dollars on subway construction beyond what is already underway, the agency will be out of the rail construction business at least for the near term.

"All the agency's problems — with operations, with money, with rail construction — were so overwhelming that the agency spent insufficient time on its regional role," says Booz Allen Hamilton consultant Doug Carter. "The board has been plugging the holes of a sinking ship. Triage was required. But [new CEO Julian] Burke is succeeding in putting the agency's financial house in order."

Indeed Burke has gotten high marks for addressing the agency's looming fiscal crisis, but others say that the fact that he's succeeded in propping up one wall of a collapsing structure is only postponing the agency's inevitable demise. And given the looming fiscal crises Burke certainly hasn't had the time or inclination to address the larger issue of governance.

Many would argue the triage isn't over, and won't be until the agency looks a lot more like what it did before the merger. This process has already been initiated with a transit restructuring study that has recommended the development of several transit zones and the spin off of MTA bus operations to other providers in outlying areas. Plans to develop a separate transit zone in the San Fernando Valley are moving forward, as are plans to expand a transit zone in the neighboring San Gabriel Valley.

A change in board leadership could accelerate this devolution. L.A. County Supervisor Yvonne Burke will soon replace L.A. Mayor Richard Riordan, a former businessman who has shown little talent for building consensus or coalitions, as chair of the MTA board, and this could signal a new focus for the MTA. “Supervisor Burke is a consensus builder, and it is her belief the MTA needs to develop a regional perspective,” says Assistant Chief of Staff Mike Bohlke. “As well there is now a general consensus on the board that the MTA as a bus operator cannot be all things to all people. Clearly there are areas where the municipal operators can provide better service.

This could be too little, too late, and the fact that the MTA has completely lost credibility means that it’s unlikely there will be broad public support for any public transportation plan or any more funding initiatives to support one. “But a number of factors are converging — an overwhelming need for better public transit, financial constraints that make it difficult to build a regional rail system, and an air quality problem that isn’t going away - all of which lead to but one conclusion,” says SCAG’s Mark Pisano. “The MTA has got to come up with a different strategy for providing public transit.”

Are the MTA’s problems due to the fact that the MTA board - which is charged with making long-term decisions about regional transportation investments - is composed of term-limited politicians with parochial interests? Or is the moral of the story about the dangers of accretion and the accumulation of power? Do large government agencies necessarily lose focus and control over internal functions?

The answer is probably “yes” to all of the above questions, though no one factor is wholly responsible for the mess the MTA finds itself in. What is clear is that the bus versus rail debate has obscured the agency’s myriad other problems - each of which is far more complex and far less media-genic than the corruption and cost-overruns that have plagued rail construction. What’s clearly missing is a vision and the ability to bring the region to consensus on a plan that will move Southern California into the 21st Century. What is unclear is whether the agency as it is now structured will be able to deliver that vision.

A Case for Regional Planning: the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council

The Metropolitan Council of Minneapolis/St. Paul was formed in 1967 as one of the earliest regional responses to sprawl. The issue at the time was not traffic: it was the fact that septic tanks were contaminating the drinking water of the fast-growing suburbs. The contaminated water threatened health as well as the ability to gain federal mortgage insurance. The crisis demanded a regional sewer treatment plan, and the Met Council was born.

The Council covers 7 counties and must interact with 187 separate jurisdictions within its borders. Its 17 board members are appointed by the Governor, with 16 representing districts and the 17th at-large member serving as chair. Its record over three decades is marked by power and impotence, success and failure. "Most people would say the fortunes of the Met Council have gone up and down depending on the quality of people who were put there," says Curtis Johnson, Chair of the Council Board from 1995-1998. "Some governors didn't pay any attention at all."

"In the early days, it was a blue-ribbon panel and got lots of attention from the Governor." says Myron Orfield, a Minnesota state legislator and author of *Metropolitics*. Acting under the state's Metropolitan Planning Act, the Council required local jurisdictions to submit comprehensive plans and supervised regional plans for sewer and transit development. The Council established the Municipal Urban Service Area (MUSA): housing beyond the MUSA line was to be restricted to ten-acre lots, without access to the sewer system. The line has prevented leapfrog development, and has helped ensure that new housing and office complexes did not overtax sewer and road systems. Leaders in the region debate whether the MUSA line is a true urban growth boundary, intended to control sprawl. But Johnson notes that if you have control of transportation, water and sewer systems, "you never have to utter the words 'land use.'"

The Council also oversaw the region's unique tax-base sharing arrangement, instituted in 1974, in which 40% of taxes from new development go into a common pool to be redistributed equitably across the region. The plan was instituted in the legislature as part of a deal to put land use controls into place. Tax base sharing has dramatically reduced inequities in tax capacity in the region; the range between jurisdictions is about six to one. It has also helped reduce bidding wars and has encouraged a cooperative approach to wooing business development.

But as attention from the Governor waned in the late 70's, the Council lost momentum. "Governors began to view metropolitan politics as a can of worms, and they did not want to invest political capital for a metropolitan vision." says Lee Munnich, a senior fellow at the Humphrey Institute. "By the mid-80's the Met Council not viewed as important as an agency in the scheme of things and had lost a lot of power." The three agencies that actually planned and ran the sewer and transit systems grew independent and overwhelmed the Council politically, pursuing their own agendas without regional coordination. Their board members were appointed by the Met Council, but the Council's lack of staff and direction had left a void. "After 10 years, the Council started filling up with political hacks," says Orfield. "The people appointed didn't understand what they were supposed to do." The Council became cautious, failing to challenge local governments that defied regional growth plans.

In the 1980s and early 90's, developers lobbied to become Council members and then pushed to extend or amend the MUSA line. Suburban communities zoned to exclude apartments and townhomes, while ignoring Met Council policy on restricting development outside the MUSA line to ten-acre lots. The Minneapolis/St. Paul region, with a historically low population density, sprawled out along with the rest of the nation. Last year the Twin Cities made the Sierra Club's list of top-ten sprawling metro areas.

The Council's reach was dramatically extended by the State Legislature in 1994, when the lawmakers directed it to take over operation as well as planning for the sewer and bus systems. The Council's budget skyrocketed from 30 million to 600 million a year. "After the merger… the Council is clearly dealing with things in a better manner," says Nacho Diaz, Director of Transportation Planning at the Metropolitan Council. At the staff level, he says "the planners work more closely with the implementers now." The merger helped raise the visibility and clout of the Council, and once the growing pains were over, it created a seamless agency that was ready to take on a more ambitious role in the region.

The Met Council is committed to developing a transit system that includes a light-rail line and a network of dedicated busways, and money was set aside in TEA-21 for that purpose. While Minnesota's gas tax is restricted for use on roads and bridges, the Minnesota DOT has agreed that it can fund the busways, since they involve roadways with vehicles running on rubber tires. The relationship between MNDOT and the Met Council is often described as a partnership, and MNDOT often defers to the Council on road decisions in the Twin Cities area.

The Council has maintained a complex web of relationships with the 187 political jurisdictions it covers, even as it interacted directly with the general public. "There is a great deal of tradition about 'talking it over' in Minnesota, talking it over one more time." says Diaz. Over the years approval of local comprehensive plans has "evolved to be more of a cooperative approach," says Diaz, and four Met Council planners are assigned to work exclusively as liaisons with local governments. Local elected officials make up half of the Transportation Advisory Board, which manages transportation planning and allocates federal transportation dollars. The Council seeks public involvement in its planning by holding meetings across the Twin Cities region, but activist Mat Hollinshead observes, "The feeling up until now has been, certainly in the transportation area, the public is asked to come in and give feedback and validate when the big decisions have already been made."

In 1995 and 1996, again at the urging of the legislature, the Council undertook a wide-ranging visioning and long-term planning process. It collected input from citizens and leaders across the region about future growth. The resulting "2040 Plan," adopted by the Council in 1996, set an expected boundary for mature urban growth by the year 2040, and called for careful development of the "urban reserve" close to the edges of that boundary. The plan put into place clear guidelines of what should be built inside the urban service area, and provides a framework for financially rewarding compact and transit-oriented development.

But the plan also came under serious criticism. Orfield calls the plan a "disaster" because it added 80,000 acres to the Metropolitan Urban Service Area. "The (plan) made the boundaries more firm and created an urban growth boundary, but the boundary is out on the moon," says Orfield. "The line won't be meaningful until we're all dead."

The hottest debate surrounding the Council in the last few years is fundamentally about public input and accountability: a strong push is on to turn the Council into an elected body. Proponents believe electing the Council would end its dependence on the attention and commitment of the Governor, and bring more accountability to an agency that controls so much money and power. "The Met Council has been sort of this hybrid," says Munnich. "It doesn't have legitimacy of being elected like a city council or legislature, yet the governor who appoints the Council hasn't been a strong supporter of where the Council needs to go." Skeptics think elections might allow developers to "buy" seats and without campaign finance reform could introduce all the unsavory traits of electoral politics into the Council.

But critics and proponents alike believe the Council is poised to take on a bigger role in controlling the region's growth. Governor Jesse Ventura is backing up the Council's power to build transit and enforce land use policies and has chosen Ted Mondale, son of former Vice President Walter Mondale, as Board chair. For the first time in the region's history, a single Governor has appointed the entire Council; Ventura's choices were announced in mid-April and the St. Paul Pioneer Press led its story by simply listing the Board's diversity: "Farmer, college spokesman, probation officer, mediator, Muslim activist, Hmong activist, open space advocate." Only one person with real estate ties made the cut. The Council appears ready to begin to flex its muscle; in a dispute over funding a park and ride lot Mondale recently indicated that he is prepared to use the Council's funding authority as leverage to entice county governments to participate in the region's plans for fair housing and smart growth. "On paper this is the most powerful regional government in country, there is nothing even close to it," observes Orfield, who generally believes the Council has been ineffective. However, the Council is backed by strong land use planning laws as well as its own blueprint for growth, which even critics agree is a good document. With direct control of sewer, water, transportation, and even parks and housing development, as well as veto power over local long-range plans, the Met Council can make decisions that direct growth in a way that promotes the health of the entire region. Curtis Johnson believes “the Council represents an enormous advantage, simply because most metro regions in America don’t have any machinery at all to try to make decisions on regional basis.” If the Metropolitan Council chooses to use its powers, the Twin Cities could become a model for urban development and growth.

San Francisco's MTC and Maryland's Smart Growth: Using Leverage Wisely

The San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission is both the federal metropolitan planning organization for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area and the regional transportation planning agency under state law. The region has almost 7 million inhabitants, over 90 cities and about a dozen transit operators, including a regional rail authority. MTC is a unique entity in California, as it was created by the state legislature as a unit of government. The legislature clearly defined membership, authority and function for the MTC. The authorities provided under state legislation included regional planning and programming, transit coordination, project approval authority over both transit and highway projects. Thus MTC has considerable state authority, in addition to its federal responsibilities as a Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Over time, due to its good performance, the legislature has accorded additional responsibilities to the MTC, including programming regional sales tax and bridge toll revenues, and setting up the regional motorist call box system. While the agency has gotten involved in more activities over time, it has steered clear of taking over operation of public transit or project development on the highway system, under the theory that separation of planning and finance authorities from operation and ownership functions prevented bias in the planning and funding process. Historically MTC has also stayed away from local land use planning or even regional land use planning, preferring to leave that function to the council of governments. That has begun to change in some noteworthy ways in the past several years.

First, with the passage of ISTEA in 1991, the agency began to take a more active role in structuring its programming function, using a weighted scoring process. The scoring system favors operation and management projects over highway capacity expansion, and projects that improve accessibility by transit, walking, or bicycling over projects that provide mobility only for automobiles. This programming initiative changed the mix of projects in the region's TIP from highway to transit. For instance, twice as many transit projects were programmed by MTC as were programmed by the individual counties. The agency also used the passage of ISTEA as a pretext for making its documents, particularly the Transportation Improvement Program, which allocates state and federal funding, more user-friendly stand-alone documents.

At the same time, MTC elected to fund local congestion management agencies to undertake land use planning activities using the flexibility provided in the federal Surface Transportation Program (STP) funding. It allocated 1/2 of 1 percent of federal STP funding to land use/ transportation planning by county agencies. The regional planning agency in Portland, Metro, has taken a similar action, programming federal STP funds to land use planning coordination with transportation.

In the past few years, MTC's cautious staff has been encouraged by its Commissioners to be more proactive with respect to quality of life and land use issues. It has accordingly initiated a new Transportation for Livable Communities program, which reserves $9 million annually of federal TEA-21 funds for projects which reduce sprawl and make communities more livable. Up to $500,000 of these funds are reserved for planning projects, while the rest are available for local traffic calming, main street revitalization and transit oriented development types of projects. Local agencies compete for this funding on an annual basis and MTC staff have found it an effective way to encourage localities to take actions which benefit the region as a whole by reducing auto travel, and thus improving air quality and by making communities more livable.

MTC has also aggressively moved into encouraging a refocus of transportation activities away from adding new highway capacity and toward improved operations and management of the transportation system. Its TRAVINFO project provides for transit and highway information on a real time basis and it Commuter Check program works with local employers to provide scrip usable on all of the regions transit systems. This refocus on operations and management also affected its programming. MTC has weighed in with Caltrans the state transportation agency on several occasions to force them to downscale major highway projects to eliminate or reduce new capacity. Essentially the agency has used its project approval authority to force redesign of projects by threatening to disapprove the project. In fact, MTC management maintains that the most effective use of veto power is to threaten its use – and that waiting to actually use it means it has become too late in the process to allow creative solutions to interagency disputes.

MTC is a notable example of an agency that has used its considerable power judiciously to change decision-making. Some critics have maintained that it has been too cautious, particularly in the land use arena, but it has been far more proactive than the ARC or most other MPOs in forcing reexamination of transportation priorities by the state and by the county engineers. In recent years it has been more active on the land use front, and its early successes are encouraging it to be more expansive in this area. It has benefited from a clearly defined set of authorities, and by clearly defining its roles and responsibilities in the process. It has also effectively used its ability to say "no" as a threat, and has jawboned agencies into doing its will without ever having to actually use the veto.

Maryland's Smart Growth Program

The state of Maryland's Smart Growth Program has been credited by many for spurring the renewed interest in livability and smart growth that has swept the nation in the past two years. Anchored by Governor Paris Glendening's landmark Smart Growth Initiative
in 1997, the program uses a variety of financial incentives to direct growth into existing communities while preserving green space on the fringe. The heart of the program is the establishment of "Priority Funding Areas," existing communities where growth is planned and infrastructure is in place. Developments outside these areas are not eligible for state financial assistance. The Rural Legacy Program,

a plan to purchase and protect thousands of acres of rural land, was a key part of getting the program through the legislature. The program succeeded politically by having both a metro and a rural component, and the program continues to succeed by more effectively using existing resources rather than by grabbing new money or new power from local government.

Maryland counties and municipalities submitted their Preferred Funding Area (PFA) designations to the state in October 1998. On the basis of these, the Governor in January 1999 announced his Administration's decision to curb funding for several sprawl-inducing bypasses around exurban towns in various parts of the state as a violation of the Smart Growth law. These decisions, which stopped over half a billion dollars in road projects, evoked local resistance and follow up work by the State DOT and Office of Planning to identify alternative that might address traffic issues that had given rise to demands for the bypasses. One of the five bypass projects was restored under stringent conditions limiting related development impacts, but the other decisions have held.

The State Office of Planning and State DOT are working with non-traditional partner groups (the Citizens Planning and Housing Association, 1000 Friends of Maryland, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Baltimore Urban League, and Environmental Defense Fund) under a federal Transportation and Community and System Preservation (TCSP) Pilot Program grant to help identify traffic reduction Smart Growth strategies for rural and inner suburban areas to head off future bypass demands.

The Maryland Smart Growth law does not bar major new highways connecting PFAs to each other and does nothing to curb automobile-dependent development patterns within PFAs. The State and local agencies still lack good information about how alternative development patterns or management strategies within PFAs might affect the amount of traffic and viability of community services, given limited resources for new infrastructure development. These are issues that the metropolitan planning organizations, local, and state agencies and their stakeholders will be exploring in the next several years in implementing and refining Maryland's Smart Growth strategy.

The way that the Smart Growth program defined the issue has been central to its success. Very simply, the premise of the program is that too many state resources were being invested in developing new communities, and that those same resources could be more effectively dedicated to helping revitalize existing suburban and urban areas. The legislation thus asked local communities to define smart growth areas in their existing communities and required that state subsidies, subventions and grants go to help these existing communities accommodate growth. As seen above, transportation subsidies are a key part of this program and resources have been dedicated to such projects as improving access to transit stations under the program. By defining the issue as being about the most effective allocation of state resources, while allowing local communities to define Priority Funding Areas, the program helps the state meet growth goals while allowing local control.

Findings

While GRTA is a unique agency, the variety of case studies explored here do offer some important lessons for this new entity.

The Twin Cities' Met Council provides some important lessons on governance and political will. A Board appointed by the Governor requires close attention and political support from the Governor in order to be successful. When the Governor fails to pay attention and Board membership becomes just a patronage position; the board will tend to shy away from the inevitable conflicts and decisions it must make. The lack of gubernatorial support will contribute to this trend, and the board will allow its authority to be usurped by other agencies with more direction and more staff.

Having great regulations and guidelines is important: but political will is more important. By some accounts, the Met Council has long had the power on paper to direct growth in more efficient productive ways in the Twin Cities. It just has not exercised that power, and has allowed its scope to be narrowed. For example, the Council has never taken a local government to court over a violation of regional guidelines. However, part of the optimism over the Council's future is due to the fact that it does have good regulations and clear guidelines in place, so that when a new board is truly empowered it will have the tools it needs to implement its vision.

The MTC in San Francisco provides a lesson in the judicious use of the power to use regulations and guidelines to say "no:" the veto is best used as a negotiating tool early in the game, rather than as a blunt instrument to stop bad projects.

The agencies studied show a variety of approaches to the division of operations and planning of transit systems. The Met Council has found that regional control of both the planning and operation of the transit system works, because the cultures of the agencies have been merged successfully so that they have become collaborative and a broader vision has emerged. The joint agency has helped give the entire council more visibility and power, but critics worry about the inherent conflict of interest for the Council.

On the other hand, the Los Angeles MTA shows how a mega-agency can quickly be captured by the same political interest which have created the problems the new agency is trying to resolve. GRTA must structure itself to avoid these problems, partly by staying clear of the political entities that have captured the process in the past.

The LA MTA also shows the dangers in getting too much operational control too fast, while the example of the Bay area MTC shows the value in maintaining clear separation of operating and fiscal functions. At least at first, GRTA should concentrating on getting the operating agencies to perform better, rather than on planning for takeover of the existing agencies. By devoting significant resources to the establishment of an independent information gathering, data integration, and evaluation capacity, GRTA could help the establish accountability of all the operating agencies to progress on meeting regional benchmarks.

All of the successful case studies have one thing in common: clear-working relationships with other governing agencies in the region. The Met Council has devoted planning staff to the task of working with county planners to be sure local plans meet regional goals.
The Twin Cities example also shows how a state Department of Transportation can work effectively and cooperatively with a regional agency to meet the transportation needs of the community. The MTC and Maryland Smart Growth Initiative have been successful in part because they make the responsibilities of all parties very clear. The powers of the local governments have been set out ahead of time, minimizing the inevitable turf battles that ensue when a controversy arises.

The case studies demonstrate that public accountability and involvement is of primary importance for a successful regional agency. The worst-case scenario was realized in Los Angeles, when the MTA's relationship with some residents became so adversarial that the citizens resorted to a lawsuit that resulted in a court-ordered consent decree. The agency's complete lack of credibility with the wider public saps its ability to direct meaningful regional planning. In the Twin Cities, the Met Council has a better track record and reputation, yet the most pressing MC issue is over how to bring more direct accountability to this appointed body. Citizens may have hope that the Council will steer the region in the right direction, but many would still like to see the council members chosen by more democratic means, such as direct election.

The SF MTC and Maryland examples show the power of using the fiscal authority to entice better integration of transportation and land use decisions. In Maryland, the state has clearly dedicated subsidies to desired development areas. Similarly, the MTC has rewarded local initiatives to reduce sprawl and make communities more livable by setting aside funding in a competitive program. GRTA can follow this lead. GRTA can also learn from Maryland that it is important to redirect transportation subsidies to existing communities to help them accommodate growth rather than allowing transportation investments to drive development that results in sprawl on the fringe of metro areas.

Recommendations for GRTA:

Our recommendations fall in two areas: structural and substantive.

GRTA Should Create a Structure for Success:

- **GRTA Must Have an Independent Core Staff:** Experience in other regions has demonstrated that there is no quicker way for an agency to be captured by parochial interests than for it to be staffed by detailees from existing agencies, or hosted by those agencies. While GRTA does not need to duplicate the engineering and planning expertise of GDOT and the ARC, it should have an independently hired and housed core expert staff that is capable of questioning the policy, analytical and engineering assumptions of the transportation and land use agencies in the reasons, and backed by independent data collection, synthesis, and evaluation capabilities.

- **Define Agency Relationships**: GRTA should enter into Memorandums of Agreement with GDOT, the ARC and MARTA which specify the relative role of each agency in the transportation/ air quality planning and programming process. Similar agreements might be considered for other agencies, such as the Georgia Rail Passenger Authority and the Georgia Environmental Protection Division. These agreements should set forth the expectations that GRTA has for each agency in preparing plans and programs for its approval. The approval and veto authority accorded to GRTA will be an effective tool only if GRTA can lay out a clear road map to approval of the Regional Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Plan for GDOT, the ARC and MARTA to follow. Memoranda of Agreement are the appropriate place to spell out GRTA's expectations. The following items should be included in such Memoranda:
    - The Memoranda should spell out what should be included in the Regional Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program for GRTA to approve them, including the overall schedule, the public outreach process to be followed in developing these documents and the times at which GRTA members and staff should be consulted. A sample outline for a Transportation Improvement Program is attached as an example of the kind of detail that GRTA could ask for from GDOT and ARC.
    - GRTA could specify specific programs and standards by which the TIP and RTP will be judged in the memoranda.
    - GRTA could insist that the ARC dedicate a portion of the federal STP funding to a Livable Communities grant program, similar to the TLC program in the San Francisco Bay Area. Such a program would invite local governments and transit agencies in the region to apply for funds to accomplish local traffic management and traffic calming projects, transit oriented development and main street type programs. The project could coordinate with

the ARC's proposed town center and activity center RTP policy in which $5 million over the next 5 years is proposed to be allocated to investment policy studies in these centers, with funding for implementation to follow. Similarly, GRTA could ask the ARC and GDOT to set aside federal funding in the TIP for congestion relief projects in the traffic management area, such as traffic signal coordination to give priority to transit vehicles, traveler information programs and parking management programs. Finally GRTA should insist in a memoranda with the ARC that it allocate a small portion of federal STP funds for land use planning by counties and cities in the region, so that transportation and land use plans are better coordinated.

- **Involve the Public and Private Sector and Public Interest Groups:** GRTA should partner with the federal government, local government, community groups and the private sector to build a consensus for a more livable future for the region. Regular, ongoing public outreach and involvement of affected parties should be a hallmark of GRTA's work. The failure to engage affected communities in a responsible and ongoing way has been a chief reason for the failure of the existing process. GRTA should take a leadership role in the education of the public about the problems Atlanta faces and the menu of potential solutions, as well as visions for a different future. Such outreach should go far beyond standard public hearings and can take many forms, from market research to partnerships with existing groups that can help reach broad segments of the community.

  One opportunity that exists in the Atlanta region is for GRTA to reach out to the emerging Partnership for Regional Livability, a unique federal/foundation partnership with an initial focus on Atlanta, along with Chicago, San Francisco and Denver. Sponsored by a diverse group of national foundations, including the Turner Foundation, the Partnership engages the federal government in leveraging diverse federal programs to achieve consensus regional goals. Atlanta's Partnership for Regional Livability may offer an opportunity for GRTA to add a broad based public outreach component to its planning process, and for federal agencies and foundations to join with GRTA in solving the region's congestion, air quality and livability problems.
  Another opportunity is for GRTA to become actively involved in the Assessment of Environmental Justice Issues in Atlanta that is being undertaken by US DOT, with involvement of Georgia DOT and ARC, and a coalition of environmental justice and environmental groups. This Assessment will review compliance of the Atlanta transportation planning process with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and evaluate whether the benefits and burdens of transportation in metropolitan Atlanta are equitably distributed, identifying strategies that might improve equity and public involvement in transportation planning.

GRTA Should Plan for Smart Growth:

- **Beyond Conformity: GRTA Must Insist on Plans and Programs Which Confront Congestion and Air Quality, and Equity Issues in a Real Way:** GDOT and the ARC are working together to develop a regional transportation improvement plan which can pass the transportation conformity test. But a plan that passes conformity through technical manipulation, vehicle-based improvements, and adjustment on the margins will not solve the livability, congestion , equity or air quality problems that are at the heart of Atlanta's problems. In fact, the forecasted increase in population and travel demand are expected to quickly overwhelm short-term technology fixes. At best, a conforming TIP will only delay the inevitable day of judgement. GRTA must push the relevant agencies to do more: to link transportation and land development plans around pedestrian and transit oriented neighborhoods, to develop alternatives to the construction and widening of highways, to provide incentives for individuals to use those alternatives, and to reduce the inequitable distribution of burdens and benefits of transportation. Ultimately, GRTA should begin defining in real, everyday terms a regional vision for communities, how they interact, travel and grow.

- **Set Accountability Standards:** GRTA should set explicit goals, objectives and performance standards related to air quality, equity, livability and transportation improvement, and ensure that transportation and air quality plans and programs are prepared according to these standards. In addition to these outcome goals, GRTA should set process goals and standards for the agencies that specify the steps that need to be taken in the planning, programming, and systems operation and management process. These goals, objectives and standards should be incorporated into the agency Memorandums of Understanding adopted with GDOT, the ARC and MARTA and made public so that the public can judge progress in meeting the standards. GRTA should issue regular evaluations of progress, including analysis of changes in the distribution of benefits and burdens of transportation. GRTA should not adopt or approve plans and programs that do not meet its own performance standards. Such measures can specify that transportation plans or programs must improve performance on specific measures of safety, air and water quality, community economic development, operational efficiency, equity and environmental justice, quality of life, and accessibility for passengers and freight.

- **Develop a Strategy for Smart Growth:** Acting as the Governor's Development Council, GRTA should begin the process of adopting specific strategies for smart growth management for the Atlanta metropolitan area. The creation of a state comprehensive development plan with a clear vision for smart growth can provide a firm base from which GRTA can act in the future. Using the Georgia Planning Act as a base, GRTA can implement many of the recommendations of the Growth Strategies Reassessment Task Force. The use of incentives to encourage good growth management is a particularly powerful strategy recommended by the Task Force.

One way to implement such incentives is to identify Smart Growth Areas in the region, using criteria such as livability, competitiveness, equity, and environmental concerns to determine where to direct future growth. Such areas can be developed in cooperation with local governments and the private and non-profit sectors through the Partnership for Livability process outlined below. Once Smart Growth Areas for infill and other types of development are identified, the GRTA can support plans which direct funds to regionally significant development and transportation projects in these areas.

In addition to identifying such Smart Growth Areas, GRTA should look for ways to encourage development of innovative pilot projects that demonstrate how coordinated land use and transportation planning can create attractive communities that work better locally and regionally. Such pilot projects can become a powerful tool for encouraging broader regional change. One potential source of funding for such pilots is the Transportation and Community and System Preservation Pilot Program (TCSP) of TEA-21.

- **Make Use of New Research on Transportation and Land Use:** There is substantial ongoing research on the interaction between transportation and land use in the Atlanta region. The SMARTRAQ project at Georgia Tech, which is being funded by GDOT, ARC, USDOT, and CDC, will provide important information on both transit and pedestrian oriented development that should guide transportation/air quality planning in the region. The Turner Foundation has funded four studies on transportation and growth in Atlanta, all of which provide important data for GRTA's efforts. In addition, the US DOT has initiated in mid-1999 an assessment of environmental justice related to Atlanta's transportation. GRTA should monitor the progress of these studies and factor their results into its efforts.

- **Ensure that funding is provided to local governments for transportation/land use planning.** As noted above, the MTC allocates 0.5% of its federal STP funding to county agencies for land use/transportation plan coordination. The Portland metropolitan area uses TEA-21 for a similar program to ensure integration of transportation and land planning, particularly around transit stations. GRTA could do the same thing.

- **Conditional approval of highway projects.** GRTA should condition its approval of any capacity expanding highway projects in TIPs or RTPs on the development of access management plans for each which ensure that the state or local authority deny access to sprawl inducing projects. **These access management plans should be used to give incentives for compact mixed use and pedestrian and transit-oriented development and travel demand management systems.**

Appendix: Outline for A Model Transportation Improvement Program

The TIP is one of the most important products of the transportation planning process as it has been recast under federal law. Prior to ISTEA and TEA-21, the TIP was a largely meaningless wish list of projects, one source which the state used to choose projects for federal funding. ISTEA and TEA-21 changed all that, making the TIP the document from which federal projects were selected. Both the metropolitan TIP and the state TIP thus become an important step in the transportation planning process, and thus they need to be recast as user friendly documents that can be seen to comply with the substantive requirements of ISTEA. What follows is intended to be an outline for such a Transportation Improvement Program either at the level of the State or the Metropolitan Planning Organization. Other outlines are clearly possible for the TIP — this is intended merely as one possible way of presenting the information.

Sample TIP Outline

I. Executive Summary — a two page outline of the contents of this document which details its purpose, relationship to planning process, amount and sources of funds programmed, major projects included and time period covered.

II. Introduction and Background — A statement of the purpose of the TIP, the legal requirements for it in ISTEA, and the relationship of the TIP to the planning process (i.e.. management systems, long range plan, major investment studies and specific project development and environmental processes. Should include a chart of the entire process, including any relevant air quality and equity analysis processes, so that the reader can be oriented.

III. Sources of Funds — This section should detail and explain the various sources of funds included in the Transportation Improvement Program, both federal and non-federal. It should explain the eligible uses of each category of funding and provide background on limitations and availability.

IV. Financial Plan — This section should show how much money is available for each category of funding for each year in the TIP. If innovative sources of funding or bonding are used, this plan should so indicate and explain the assumptions involved in paying back any debt. All financial assumptions should be indicated in the financial plan, including any assumptions about revenue, such as tax or rate increases, appropriation levels or obligation authority. Any parts of the TIP, which rely on future action by a legislative body to raise the money, should be clearly identified. Financial assumptions should be specific to the specific categories of funding. Escalation rates for project costs by program year should be outlined here as well. The TIP must be financially constrained, which means that funding must be available for a project within the time period covered by the TIP if it is to be included within the document.

The financial plan should list the annual costs for maintaining and rehabilitating the existing highway, local street and road and transit system. These estimates can be derived from the management systems, which need to be based on a life cycle cost analysis. The plan should clearly show that the TIP first addresses these costs and demonstrates that the region has financial capacity to maintain the existing physical plant per management system strategies before using funding to expand the system. The plan should estimate how much of the costs of different aspects of the transportation system (roads vs. transit) are paid for by different racial, ethnic, and income groups and classes of users (road users vs. transit users) to provide an indication of the equity of system financing relative to benefits.

V. Project Selection Criteria — This section should outline the process for selecting specific projects from those proposed generally in the plan, so that a financially constrained TIP can be put forward. A project selection process can be loosely organized into three stages: screening criteria, scoring criteria, and programming criteria. Screening criteria are those which weed out clearly ineligible or unripe projects. Scoring criteria are those, which rank projects against objectives or goals, identified in the planning process or deriving from ISTEA's planning factors. Programming criteria are criteria that organize the TIP — into program year, fund source and jurisdiction. Project selection criteria are thus qualitative and quantitative. The TIP needs to let a person know what criteria were used to pick the mix of projects proposed within it.

VI. Project Listings and Maps and Summary Information — This section of the TIP identifies all projects included in the TIP. It should be subdivided by year, by jurisdiction (county, city), and then by funding category. Each project listing needs to identify the route, program or facility number or name, the geographic location, a brief description of project type, scope and purpose, and an identification of costs by fund source and program year, and should be complemented by a set of maps that help identify location and start and end points of projects. Special information such as air quality status (exempt, TCM, etc.), whether the project involves a Major Investment Study, and status of the environmental review process (including approval dates), relevant federal and state wetlands, endangered species, and historic preservation reviews and permits, Section 106 Project Specification and Estimate (PS&E) project agreements (including approval dates) for each phase of the project, Title VI compliance analysis, and other key milestones, should be identified as well. The project listing section should include a sample page explaining how one reads this section, as this is the most technical part of the TIP.

VII. Adoption Schedule and Public Involvement Process — The draft TIP should explain the process for review and adoption of the document, including date, time and place for all hearings, and meetings where the TIP will be discussed. The draft TIP should also explain the process for submission of comment or questions on the document as well as the process the agency will use to consider and respond to comments. The draft TIP should also explain where the reader could go to examine or receive copies of background information on the TIP or projects included therein.

The final TIP needs to include a documentation of public comments received as well as the responses to these comments. Any changes made to the draft in response to public comment should be clearly indicated.

VIII. Major Investment Studies — Per ISTEA's planning regulations, the planning process needs to identify what corridors in the state or region have a need for significant capacity expansion. This section should list the Major Investments Studies proposed in the plan or identified here in the TIP by corridor and briefly outline the status and schedule for each.

IX. Finding of Consistency with Plan — ISTEA requires that TIPs be drawn from conforming long range transportation plans. A brief discussion of the plan, its goals and measures of performance, and the manner in which this TIP advances those goals and meets those measures would demonstrate consistency here. Any differences should be identified as well. The relationship to the ISTEA management systems should also be discussed.

The requirement that capacity expanding projects first be considered through a Congestion Management System should be addressed here. Any such projects in the TIP should be listed and the CMS consideration should be documented. All demand and system management actions taken should be listed.

X. Air Quality Conformity Finding — In air quality nonattainment areas, a finding of conformity with the relevant SIP needs to be made. This finding should have two parts: an analysis which demonstrates that all applicable Transportation Control Measures are being implemented in a timely and expeditious manner, and a demonstration that the projects and programs being financed by the TIP lead to the attainment of air quality standards. The TCM analysis should list all relevant TCMs and the schedule for their implementation, should identify funding status and implementation status for each TCM and should provide contingency TCMs for any that are stalled.

The analysis of the TIP programs and projects needs to be a quantitative analysis using the five step modeling process. The TIP should include as much documentation of the process as possible, and at the least should tell the reader where complete documentation could be obtained. The TIP should show

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), vehicle speed and emissions for the region as a whole and for specific corridors and subareas within the region. Projects for which detailed CO analysis will be required later should be identified. The TIP should identify where the full documentation and digital data related to the modeling assumptions, model setups, and outputs can be obtained for independent public review.

XI. Results of TIP Implementation/ TEA-21 Planning Factors/Civil Rights and Environmental Justice — This section should identify and analyze the distribution of benefits and burdens of implementing the proposed TIP and RTP relative to the current distribution of burdens and benefits related to transportation, by race, ethnicity, and income. This analysis should consider who pays and who gains from transportation investment and management strategies and policies, including both direct and indirect costs and benefits. How much time will be saved, in the aggregate and in specific corridors by different racial, ethnic, and income groups? What will be the distribution of impacts among these groups related to vehicle speed, transit use, VMT reduction or use of modes such as telecommuting, walking and cycling? What gaps in transit service or access will be filled and how will these vary among these groups? What changes in access to opportunities by persons of various income sand individuals of different races or ethnicities will result? What economic and environmental benefits and burdens will result for the region as a whole and how will these be distributed among specific communities and population groups within the region, by race, ethnicity, and income? How will the TIP and RTP assure a timely understanding and remediation of potential inequities in the exposure of low income and minority communities to air and water and noise pollution and inequities in the assignment of costs of cleaning these up?

This section should also examine ISTEA's Planning factors, as well as those added by regulation, and provide a discussion as to how the TIP considers each of these factors. For example, a consideration of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act would look at transit system coverage and auto ownership and use by ethnicity and census tract.

XII. Glossary of Terms — The TIP should include a glossary of technical or transportation terms used in it. An acronym dictionary would also be helpful.

About the Authors

The Surface Transportation Policy Project is a non-profit coalition of over 200 groups whose goal is to ensure that transportation policy and investments help conserve energy, protect environmental and aesthetic quality, strengthen the economy, promote social equity and make communities more livable. STPP emphasizes the needs of people, rather than vehicles, in assuring access to job, services, and recreational opportunities.

Hank Dittmar is Campaign Director for the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP). From 1993 to 1998, Dittmar was the Executive Director of the STPP and managed the coalition's successful campaign for the passage of TEA-21, the nation's first progressive transportation law. He received the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Public Policy Award in 1998 for his leadership of that legislative effort. Prior to his role as STPP's Executive Director, Hank was the Manager of Legislation and Finance for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) in Oakland, California, where he managed the $11 billion capital budget for transportation in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has also managed an urban airport and been a transit planner. Dittmar has been instrumental in developing and advocating regional and national policies on transportation and the environment, metropolitan sprawl, transit and pedestrian oriented development, and community revitalization for over twenty years.

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