PART ONE

REGIONAL GROWTH AND GOVERNANCE

or tax districts; others have called for sweeping new annexation powers for center cities or for city-county consolidations. Indeed, a handful of regions, including Portland, Minneapolis, Indianapolis, and Jacksonville, have demonstrated that these innovations are possible. But most other regions, including many of the nation's largest and fastest-growing metropolitan areas, have been unable to overcome the insurmountable political and practical obstacles that prevent the creation of similar regional institutions.

As desirable as it might be to promote such changes, in most large U.S. metropolitan regions (particularly those that span state or county boundaries), they will be difficult or impossible to carry out given the political, economic, and demographic realities. Instead, government and civic leaders would better use their time and political capital if they were to focus on initiatives that *can* happen and can make a difference in these places. Examples would include the establishment of (1) regional service and infrastructure finance and development districts and (2) commissions to plan and implement construction of transit, park, cultural, and tourism facilities and related downtown investments that benefit both cities and suburbs. Civic leaders also should focus on creating the civic groups and coalitions required to support these outcomes, many of which may take years or even decades to achieve.

The New York metropolitan region provides historic and recent examples that illustrate and support this argument. Of particular importance is the role that a not-for-profit advocacy group, the Regional Plan Association (RPA), and other civic groups have played in shaping the New York region.

For more than a century, this region, the nation's largest urban area, has confronted challenges similar to those facing U.S. metropolitan areas today. These include assimilation of millions of immigrants; rapid, unplanned development at the suburban fringe; and the pressing need to develop the transportation and environmental infrastructure required by a rapidly expanding metropolis.

In 1898 the region responded by consolidating Manhattan and five suburban counties into "Greater New York," the nation's first metropolitan government. Subsequently, however, comprehensive, regionwide solutions have not been instituted. Instead, a network of service districts, regional land-use regulatory agencies, and in one limited example, a regional tax district have been established, in most cases as a result of effective advocacy by civic groups. Other metropolitan areas have much to learn from this experience.

The terms *New York region* or *New York* as used in this chapter denote the thirty-one-county New York–New Jersey–Connecticut metropolitan region, or tri-state region, as currently defined by the Regional Plan Association and the region's metropolitan planning organizations. This area includes several primary metropolitan statistical areas (as defined by the Census Bureau) that stretch along a 100-mile radius from Manhattan. Its boundaries encompass New Haven, Connecticut, and Poughkeepsie, New York, to the north; Trenton, New Jersey, to the south; and all of Long Island to the east.

RPA's definition of the region is based on its transportation, economic, and environmental systems, such as commuter sheds, housing markets, and recreational and public water supplies. Fully 98 percent of the metropolitan area's commuter trips, for example, originate and end within this thirty-one-county tri-state region. RPA's definition of the region has been adopted by the metropolitan planning organizations and is increasingly used by the public and the media. (New York–based news media now purvey "tri-state news and weather," and businesses now promote themselves as tri-state enterprises: the metropolitan Honda dealers, for example, now advertise themselves as the "Tri-Honda dealers.")

A Century of Governance Innovation

The story of New York is the story of entrepreneurship, innovation, and tolerance of new groups and ideas. The upper reaches of its society have always been more welcoming to ambitious newcomers with foreign-sounding names and large bank accounts and not just to those with social pedigrees. Furthermore, New York never aspired to become "a City upon the Hill" or "the City of Brotherly Love"—a well-ordered, cohesive place like its northern and southern competitors.

New York's indifference to efforts by these and other places to create an ideal society has extended to the question of governance. Throughout this century there has been little political or public interest in comprehensive reforms to the region's governance system. This "system" has no metropolitan government, effective public region-wide planning, or institutionalized coordination between its 3 states, 31 counties, 800 municipalities, and more than 1,000 service districts. In spite of how inefficient and disorganized this system may appear to scholars, good-government advocates, and visiting public officials, most residents and their elected officials like the relative autonomy it affords to municipal governments.

New York is not alone in its failure to create a governance system that can adapt easily to metropolitan decentralization and growth. Most other great world centers also have failed to create metropolitan governments that increase geographically and functionally with their growing regions. The former Greater London Council and the new London Authority, for example, have had jurisdiction only within the inner urban ring of a metropolitan area that now spans all of southeastern England. Tokyo Metropolitan Government also has failed to extend borders fixed in the 1930s in a region that now includes three suburban prefectures. In North America the greater Toronto region has expanded into three suburban jurisdictions beyond the borders of Metro Toronto, the consolidated city government established in the early 1950s (and recently restructured by the province in a controversial and still incomplete reform effort).

Political Geography and Governance

The New York region has never been a neat, tidy, well-organized place. Ironically, this now may be one of the region's unique advantages in a global economy that rewards creativity and innovation, since the region's chaotic look and feel provide a fertile setting for innovators and entrepreneurs. Moreover, the region's political fragmentation is not a recent thing. In the seventeenth century, when King Charles II divided the region between the provinces of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, he unwittingly established the current state boundaries for what in the twentieth century would become the world's economic capital. The British monarch also ensured that this region would always be politically fragmented. Later this political geography would create a unique set of challenges in governing the growing metropolis. Being located at the convergence of three states—the governance equivalent of plate tectonics—has meant that, like other multijurisdictional metropolitan areas, this region never has had a strong sense of common identity or destiny.

These obstacles to creating regional institutions have been compounded by the three states' very different political systems, the product of divergent values and traditions:

— Connecticut is the southwestern outpost of New England town meeting democracy; its 169 cities and towns operate like independent republics, unconstrained by county officials (counties having been abolished in the 1950s) and subject to only limited state controls.

— New York has a tradition of strong state government and of counties and large towns that function in many ways as regional governments. (Some Long Island towns, for example, have populations exceeding half a million residents.)

— New Jersey has the densest concentration of local government in the region. For example, Bergen County's 246 square miles (located across the Hudson River from Manhattan) are divided into seventy municipalities and dozens of school and service districts. By comparison, Virginia's Fairfax County, with a similar population, economy, and place in the metropolitan Washington region, has only one general-purpose government—the county—and only one school district. New Jersey is also unique in the metropolitan area in that it has a state growth management plan; Connecticut has an "advisory" plan, and New York State has no state planning process.

A feature common to all three states, however, is their citizens' deeply held reverence for home rule, whether by town selectmen in Connecticut, supervisors in New York, or freeholders in New Jersey. Home rule is so strongly valued, and development so extensive and decentralized, that there are no unincorporated areas in any of the three states. Moreover, municipalities remain heavily dependent on property taxes, with the result that they are suspicious of tax reform or tax-sharing proposals that might jeopardize their fiscal independence.

A number of other large U.S. metropolitan regions—Philadelphia, Washington-Baltimore, Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City—have also spread across state borders. A few of these places (Philadelphia and Washington, for example) now have weak advisory metropolitan planning organizations or regional transportation authorities; but as with New York, none have created effective regionwide general-purpose governance or growth management institutions.

Rapid Growth Requires Innovations

A series of adept innovations and investments by New York City (then only the island of Manhattan) and its entrepreneurs in the first quarter of the nineteenth century helped New York become the East Coast's principal shipping and financial center by 1840. These included the city's 1811 "commissioners" plan that established the city's street grid; the first scheduled trans-Atlantic steamship service; and the construction of the Erie Canal. Subsequent ambitious investments in public water supply systems, parks, and railroads ensured that the city had the infrastructure, amenities, and quality of life to attract a rapidly expanding population and to become by midcentury the nation's undisputed economic and cultural center.

However, as a result of these actions, by the end of the nineteenth century, the city was literally choking on success, with tenement districts, streets, and streetcar lines overwhelmed by vast numbers of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Immigration also threatened the political power of the city's native-born elite. Another challenge to the city's primacy in the national economy was posed by a rapidly growing Chicago, which threatened to surpass New York in population early in the twentieth century, unless the city took bold action to consolidate with its neighboring cities and counties.

In response to these challenges, a group of progressive political and business leaders called for the consolidation of New York and four suburban counties into "Greater New York," in effect a regional government encompassing the vast majority of the metropolitan area's residents and jobs. The group's goal was to ensure that the consolidated city had the economic resources to invest in the subways, bridges, parks, water supplies, and other facilities required by the growing metropolis. (In the late nineteenth, as in the late twentieth, century, the federal government could not be relied upon to finance these systems.) Suburban leaders sought the tax base in the Manhattan business district, then—and now—the nation's largest. And Manhattan's native-born Protestant business and political elite saw consolidation as a way of ensuring a growing economy while maintaining political control of a city with a growing population of immigrant Catholics and Jews, who were heavily concentrated in the ghettos of Manhattan's Lower East Side.

After a lengthy and contentious political debate, Greater New York was constituted in 1898. Early in the new century, the consolidated city initiated a vast infrastructure development program, including the construction by 1940 of the world's largest subway, water supply and wastewater treatment systems, and networks of bridges, highways, schools, parks, and other facilities required by the growing metropolis. (In 1965, ten years after the initiation of the interstate highway system, nearly two-thirds of the nation's limited-access highway miles were located in the New York region.) As a result of consolidation, residents of communities in the outer boroughs clearly benefited from the city's expanded tax base and services, although they did lose political control over their own communities and municipal services. Residents of Manhattan's poorest minority and immigrant communities lost both political control and a share of Manhattan's commercial tax base.

A century later, the vast majority of large U.S. metropolitan areas now face problems similar to those of New York in 1898. These include growing isolation of immigrants and minorities in center cities and older suburbs, extreme congestion and the need for major new regional infrastructure investments in growing suburbs, and concerns about competition with other regions. But among the nation's largest metropolitan regions, none are considering the kind of multicounty consolidation that New York achieved a century ago. And in only a handful of places (Indianapolis, Nashville, Jacksonville) have city-county consolidations occurred. At the end of the twentieth century, three key factors impede further consolidation or annexations in most of the country:

— the extreme segregation of poor African Americans in center cities and older suburbs and the fear on the part of both inner-city and suburban elites that their political monopoly might be undercut by city-suburb consolidation;

— the shift of a rapidly growing share of regional employment, retail, and other activities (read: tax base) from center cities and older suburbs to outer-ring suburbs, with the resulting perception by outer suburbs that they have little to gain and a lot to lose from consolidation or annexation;

— the wall-to-wall incorporation of suburban areas surrounding most Northeastern, Midwestern, and West Coast cities, including Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, creating a virtual political firewall guarded by suburb-dominated state legislatures.

Only in the South and Southwest have center cities continued to annex growth areas—places that David Rusk terms *elastic cities.* These places have the advantage of being surrounded by unincorporated, largely rural regions, and they continue to dominate regional and state politics.

Greater New York

Greater New York's role as a regional government was short lived since it failed to expand as the region grew well beyond its boundaries. Ironically, the political compromises that made Greater New York possible precluded its expansion in succeeding decades. The political "deal" cut with the suburbs over the creation of Greater New York guaranteed the independence of its suburban neighbors, Nassau County to the city's east and Westchester County to the north. State borders to the south, west, and northeast precluded expansion in other directions, making Greater New York's boundaries, for all intents and purposes, permanently fixed.

Consequently, less than two decades after the creation of the consolidated city, the metropolitan area had expanded beyond the city's limits into seventeen suburban counties in parts of New Jersey, Connecticut, Long Island, and the lower Hudson River valley. This resulted from the city's inelastic boundaries and the region's dramatic growth and decentralization.

Despite rapid deconcentration of population, the region continued to be dominated well into the 1960s by the city and its near monopoly on employment and retail, culture, higher education, and other specialized services. Today the region extends into twenty-six suburban counties in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Northeastern Pennsylvania also is tied into the region's economy, commuter sheds, and transportation system, in effect making this a four-state region. Beginning in the 1970s, however, rapid decentralization of employment and other activities decreased the city's dominance over suburban districts.

Interestingly, today other metropolitan governments with boundaries fixed since the late 1960s face similar challenges. Indianapolis, for example, with its consolidated city-county government, is now growing new suburbs well beyond Marion County's permanent boundaries. As with New York, this growth beyond the metropolitan government's inelastic borders is occurring less than a quarter century after they were established.

Within two decades of the creation of Greater New York, growth and its impacts led the region's government, business, and civic leaders to the conclusion that new infrastructure was required to meet the needs of a growing city and metropolitan region. With no potential to expand metropolitan government beyond New York City's five boroughs, new public institutions would be required to build and manage the highways, bridges, tunnels, parks, and port facilities the region would require to continue to grow and prosper. A new strategy was chosen to finance, build, and manage these facilities: specialized regional authorities and service districts, many of which still shape the region and its infrastructure.

Special-Purpose Regional Authorities

Since 1922, when the Port of New York Authority was established, several special-purpose regional authorities have been created to deal with particular needs. This approach to regional problem solving—creating narrowly focused authorities rather than general-purpose regional government—has been a hallmark of regional governance in the New York metropolitan area in the twentieth century. The divisions between the three states, the strong tradition of local home rule, and the suburbs' suspicion of their powerful urban neighbor continue to preclude a more comprehensive approach.

This process occurred largely in an unplanned, ad hoc manner. Usually these institutions were established when governors or master builders worked in partnership with civic leaders. Although this approach doesn't make for a neat organization chart, these specialized authorities have largely met the needs they were intended to address. However, proposals have been made in recent years to reform these authorities and to improve coordination between them.

The Port Authority

The first, largest, and most influential of New York's regional authorities is the Port of New York Authority (now the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey), established in 1921 to improve seaport and trans-Hudson freight and passenger facilities. In the early post–World War II era, under the leadership of master builder Austin Tobin, the Port Authority assumed additional responsibilities for building and operating a broad range of infrastructure, including LaGuardia, Newark, and Kennedy Airports; several modern marine freight terminals; the Port Authority Trans-Hudson transit system; the World Trade Center; and various economic development and urban renewal programs.

In recent years the Port Authority's independence has been compromised by the direct participation of the two states' governors, who routinely exercise veto powers over its actions and investments. The setting of tolls and fares, for example, has become a highly politicized process. And in the early 1990s, the governors began to use the Port Authority's surpluses to fund each state's pet infrastructure and urban development projects (including waterfront redevelopment projects in Hoboken, New Jersey and Queens, New York; industrial parks in Yonkers, New York; an office building in Newark, New Jersey, and other distractions). In some years Port Authority funds have even been used to close annual state budget deficits. In addition to undermining the Port Authority's autonomy, these actions have ultimately compromised its ability to fulfill its core mission: building and managing world-class sea- and airports and trans-Hudson transportation facilities.

Bridge, Tunnel, and Highway Authorities

Several toll road and bridge authorities were established, beginning with the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority in 1931 under the leadership of master builder Robert Moses. Four highway authorities were created in the early post–World War II era to build new toll roads: the New York Thruway, New Jersey Turnpike, New Jersey Highway (which builds and maintains the Garden State Parkway), and Connecticut Turnpike Authorities. All but the last survive.

Since the late 1960s, the states have tightened their control over these freewheeling public authorities. In 1968 Moses's Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority was brought under the control of the newly constituted Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Since the 1970s, succeeding New Jersey governors have taken steps to tighten their control over that state's toll road authorities. Toll road authorities in Connecticut were abolished when tolls were eliminated in the early 1980s.

Transportation Authorities

In 1968 Governor Nelson Rockefeller established the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and Metro-North Commuter Railroad to revive the failing New York City subway and suburban commuter rail systems. The then-private Long Island Rail Road, the nation's largest commuter rail network, was acquired by the state and reconstituted as an operating unit of the MTA. New Jersey Transit was established to assume a similar role by acquiring and operating several bankrupt commuter rail companies.

The MTA consolidated these systems as well as the operations of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority into a single operating entity. This facilitated cross-subsidies from automobile tolls to the transit system and provided a financial base for a program of new rail services. Unfortunately, this ambitious capital investment program was stymied by the fiscal crisis that struck New York City and the state in the mid-1970s. A $25 billion capital program has restored these systems since 1980, contributing to the region's economic revival in the 1990s.

Environmental Management and Regional Park Commissions

Several agencies that were established in the 1920s to protect regional environmental systems continue to fulfill important roles. The Palisades Interstate Park Commission was established to manage the nation's first regional park, the lands atop the majestic Palisades escarpment on the Hudson River's west bank in New York and New Jersey. This commission remains active today and as recently as 1997 led the successful partnership between New York and New Jersey to protect Sterling Forest (a vast 21,000-acre open space that straddles the state line less than forty miles from Manhattan). Through Robert Moses's leadership, New York State established several other regional park authorities in the 1920s. Moses used them to build and operate his vast empire of parks and parkways over four decades, beginning in 1928. All of them were consolidated into New York State's parks department in the 1960s, as part of Governor Nelson Rockefeller's campaign to rein in Moses and the authorities.

In the area of water quality, the Interstate Sanitary Commission was established by interstate compact in the 1920s to set standards for cleanup of interstate waterways. Although it has had virtually no public visibility, for three-quarters of a century, the commission has played a critical role in setting mutually agreed upon targets for pollution reduction in New York Harbor, Long Island Sound, and the Hudson River.

The Regional Plan Association

In most cases these public authorities were established or had their responsibilities broadened by activist governors or master builder-bureaucrats. But their policies and investments have been guided and coordinated by a dense network of local and regional civic groups, many of them established to play this role. Foremost among these with regard to metropolitan planning and development issues is the Regional Plan Association (RPA), an independent, not-for-profit civic group established to prepare and promote adoption of a long-range, comprehensive plan for the region.

RPA had its origins in the Committee on the Regional Plan for New York and Environs, an ad hoc group convened in 1922 by visionary business leader Charles Dyer Norton, who was president of First National City Bank (now CitiGroup). More than a decade earlier, Norton, a native Chicagoan, had chaired the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, which sponsored Daniel Burnham's precedent-setting Chicago Plan. After arriving in New York in 1916, Norton quickly realized that metropolitan New York faced an even tougher set of planning challenges, given its rapid growth and expansion into three states.

Norton brought together a distinguished group of civic and business leaders to form the Committee on the Regional Plan. He convinced the Russell Sage Foundation to underwrite the preparation and publication of the *Regional Plan for New York and Its Environs,* the nation's first comprehensive, long-range metropolitan plan.[1] It was completed in 1929, and RPA was incorporated that same year as an independent not-for-profit organization to promote its implementation. Almost seventy years later, Norton's son, Charles McKim Norton, who served as RPA's president from 1940 until 1968, stated that he never envisioned RPA as a permanent group. "I never thought it would last," he said, thinking that at some point a public agency would step forward to take its responsibilities. This never happened, however, and sixty years after its incorporation, the association remains hard at work promoting implementation of its Third Regional Plan.

RPA is an independent, tax-exempt membership organization. Its 1,200 members range from concerned citizens to municipalities to small and large businesses. In recent years, contributions from its members have provided about half of the association's operating budget, with most of these funds coming from about one hundred major employers. (The other half of the association's funds comes from foundations and government grants and contracts.) More than half of RPA's sixty board members are business leaders. Other members include university presidents, civic leaders, and former mayors and governors. State committees in all three states consist of business, civic, and environmental leaders who provide policy guidance to the association on RPA projects and policies affecting each state.

Lacking any official responsibilities or legal powers, RPA has never had the ability to compel action on its recommendations. However, due to the clout of its powerful and well-connected board of directors, the credibility of its research, and the persistence of its staff, many, if not most, of its recommendations have been implemented over the years. It is difficult to measure precisely the association's power, since much of its advocacy is conducted behind the scenes through private discussions with opinion leaders and decision-makers.

Much of RPA's effectiveness results from its efforts to shape public opinion over time, to create a political environment in which difficult decisions or controversial investments can be made. Also, since much of RPA's advocacy occurs through coalitions of civic groups, separating the efficacy of the association's work from that of its coalition partners is sometimes difficult.

Coalition building has been the key to RPA's successful advocacy in recent years. In virtually all of its major advocacy efforts since 1968, the association has worked with coalitions of other like-minded civic, business, environmental, community, or other advocacy groups, drawing on the region's extensive network of not-for-profit civic organizations. Collectively, these groups have enormous power. In some cases RPA convenes and leads these groups; in others it provides limited staff support or performs a more narrowly defined task, such as media relations.

Patience and perseverance are the hallmarks of RPA's work and the keys to its success. In large metropolitan areas, public issues can take years and occasionally even decades to "ripen." A recent example is the 17,000-acre Sterling Forest, an exceptional natural area straddling the New York–New Jersey border only forty miles northwest of Manhattan; it was acquired for conservation purposes more than sixty-five years after RPA's First Regional Plan recommended its protection. In the intervening years, there was always someone on the association's staff responsible for promoting its protection and opposing any inappropriate development.

The acquisition finally proceeded when, at the urging of a broad coalition of civic and environmental groups (including RPA), New Jersey governor Christine Todd Whitman committed her state's tax dollars to the acquisition of Sterling Forest lands in adjoining areas of New York State. Whitman's commitment leveraged matching contributions from New York State, the federal government, and private philanthropies. It should be noted that Whitman is a long-time member of the association and daughter of a prominent RPA board member and benefactor. In her address to RPA's 1998 annual regional assembly, Whitman noted, "The preservation of Sterling Forest was certainly also a great moment for New Jersey. I want to applaud RPA's advocacy for this historic and critical purchase."

The 1929 Regional Plan

RPA's 1929 plan envisioned a New York that would be the hub of national and global markets, a center of culture and civic beauty that would provide all of its residents with the opportunity to live "the good life." The plan suggested an extensive program of infrastructure investments to enable the region to achieve this goal. It proposed construction of vast new regional networks of commuter railroads, parks and parkways, bridges and tunnels, and other facilities to accommodate the projected more than doubling of the region's population to 20 million by the plan's 1965 target year.

Although not anticipated by the plan, the arrival of the Great Depression and the New Deal actually expedited its implementation. When Roosevelt's vast public works employment programs were begun in 1933, New York was the only region in the country with a detailed public works master plan and complete preliminary engineering for major projects. Also, RPA retained a direct connection with the Roosevelt administration through its president, Frederick Delano, Roosevelt's uncle. Master builders Robert Moses (creator of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority and New York State's park commissions) and Austin Tobin (head of the Port Authority) expedited construction of most of the Regional Plan's highway, park, and other investment projects during the 1930s and 1940s. As a result of these projects, the region contained more than 60 percent of the nation's limited-access highway lane miles as late as 1965.

A major exception to this successful record, however, was the failure of RPA's ambitious proposals to expand and integrate the subway and commuter rail systems. This initiative was adamantly opposed by executives of the private commuter rail companies and by New York City mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who feared the loss of autonomy such a plan would entail. Ironically, by 1965 (the Regional Plan's target year) both the subways and commuter rail systems were on the verge of bankruptcy due to the loss of markets that would have been served by RPA's proposal and to the success of RPA's highway plan, which was largely implemented. With good highways and poor transit alternatives, most of the region's growth in the postwar era occurred in suburbs well served by the new highways and poorly served by rail.

The relationship between Robert Moses and the association was complex and changeable over the years. Moses used the Regional Plan to shape and build public support for his park, bridge, and highway proposals, and RPA became a vocal advocate for many of these projects. By the late 1930s, however, the association began to oppose several of Moses's highway and bridge projects that it felt were detrimental to the interests of inner-city communities, the environment, or the larger public interest. As a result of RPA's opposition, Moses suffered his first major defeat in 1940, when he lost federal funding for his Brooklyn Battery Bridge. Moses never again had a good word to say for the association and its policies.

Partly as a result of the vast new highway, bridge, and tunnel systems; extensive large-lot suburban zoning; and federal tax- and housing-incentive programs, the region's suburbs burgeoned during the early post–World War II period. The plan's advocacy for planned suburban centers was largely ignored as Levittown and its counterparts literally invented the American suburb. The suburban malls and office parks of the 1960s and 1970s succeeded the housing tracts of the 1940s and 1950s. As early as the 1950s, public officials, civic leaders, and scholars raised concerns about the changing shape of the region and the growing divisions between city and suburb.

The Second Regional Plan

In 1968 the Second Regional Plan was initiated to shape these trends.[2] Its research base included an in-depth study of the region's increasingly decentralized governance system, summarized in Robert Wood's 1959 landmark book *1400 Governments*.[3] Wood quantified the increased cost and complexity of this system, but he did not prescribe any solutions, and further fragmentation of local government went on largely unaffected by this research.

The association's Second Plan proposed strategies to control suburban sprawl, expand the regional open space system, and rebuild the regional rail network. The plan also supported the creation of new transportation agencies, including the previously mentioned MTA, Metro-North Commuter Railroad, and New Jersey Transit.

A major feature of the second plan was its proposal to create a network of "metropolitan centers" as a means of reining in low-density, "spread city" development that was then rapidly changing the face of the region. The plan proposed that these transit-oriented satellite employment centers be organized around a revitalized regional rail system that could capture development that would otherwise end up on "greenfield" sites in the suburbs.

Today, as a result of decades of advocacy and investment, more than a million jobs (approximately 10 percent of the region's total employment base) and most of the region's new cultural and educational institutions are located in these centers. Approximately half of the region's employment base remains in New York City and the metropolitan centers, a far higher proportion than virtually any other large U.S. metropolitan region. Despite these efforts, suburban sprawl has continued in the region throughout the 1990s: RPA estimated in 1996 that over the previous quarter-century, although the region had grown in population by only 13 percent, urbanized land had increased by more than 60 percent.

Although the Second Regional Plan did not recommend the creation of a regional government to carry out its development strategies, it did propose that counties or new regional planning agencies implement the plan through fair-share allocations of affordable housing and other facilities. It also proposed tax reforms that would remove the incentives for fiscal zoning. These steps were not adopted, however, until the New Jersey Supreme Court, in its landmark Mt. Laurel I and II decisions (in 1975 and 1983, respectively), required that fair-share housing programs be prepared as called for in the second plan.[4] These decisions led to the adoption of New Jersey's State Development and Redevelopment Plan in 1992 (discussed later). It is unclear to what extent RPA's advocacy for fair-share housing influenced or encouraged the New Jersey Supreme Court in its Mt. Laurel decisions, although the association did raise this issue to a place of prominence in public discussions and gave it legitimacy during the late 1960s and 1970s.

The Heyday of Regional Planning

From 1956 to 1981, the region experimented with several public regional planning bodies, some of which continue to operate, but two of which failed due to absence of public support. These were the Metropolitan Regional Council and the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission, initiated by activist elected leaders; New York City mayor Robert Wagner and New York governor Nelson Rockefeller. The two agencies that survived were both regional land-use regulatory commissions: the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission and the New Jersey Pinelands Commission.

Metropolitan Regional Council

In 1956 New York City mayor Robert Wagner invited city and county officials from the metropolitan region to join him in creating the Metropolitan Regional Council (MRC). This ad hoc association of chief elected municipal officials was established in response to growing concerns about suburban sprawl and the need to rescue a failing regional transit system. Wagner hoped that the MRC would promote cooperation on these and other regional issues.

When New York City later urged that the MRC gain legal status, most suburban counties and communities declined to support the proposal, and several withdrew from the group. The MRC never gained broad political support and expired in 1979, when public funding for its activities was withdrawn.

New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani briefly revived a successor group (also called the Metropolitan Regional Council) in 1994 as a political alliance of the city and suburban counties to promote reform of New York State's social service finance system. Soon after these reforms were realized, this group disbanded. The MRC experience underscores the limitations of voluntary associations of city and suburban governments with fundamentally different interests, led by politicians who come and go every four years.

Tri-State Regional Planning Commission

The Tri-State Regional Planning Commission was established in 1961, and its responsibilities dramatically expanded in 1971 to coordinate planning and public investment strategies, principally in the transportation area. The impetus for its creation was pressure from the federal government to better coordinate plans between the states, but the commission never gained broad local or state support for its activities. State transportation officials, who set the agency's policy agenda, dominated the commission's board. In 1981, when federal support was withdrawn for metropolitan planning, the Tri-State Commission had virtually no public backing, and first Connecticut, then New Jersey withdrew from it. Its responsibilities were transferred to several metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), each with jurisdiction in only a limited part of the region.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Every large U.S. metropolitan region now has an MPO with responsibility for transportation planning, as mandated by successive federal transportation grant programs. In the New York region, as in many others, the MPOs are financed and controlled by the state transportation departments, which dominate their agendas. In Connecticut, regional planning agencies were established to represent regional interests when county governments were abolished in the 1950s. These organizations serve as MPOs, governed by boards of directors dominated by their municipal participants but funded largely by grants from the Connecticut Department of Transportation. In most cases these groups mediate between conflicting municipal objectives, often to the disadvantage of the larger regional interest.

In its transportation planning, RPA takes a more comprehensive and activist role than the MPOs normally do. RPA's plans cut across MPO boundaries and look at the whole region's transportation system rather than the restricted political jurisdictions that the MPOs represent. (This limitation is now being addressed by the region's MPOs, which recently began coordinating their transportation plans.) Furthermore, RPA is unconstrained by current federal policies that limit MPO plans to current revenue streams. The association also provides public advocacy on transportation issues, unrestrained by short-term political considerations that limit the activities of MPOs in New York and elsewhere.

Land-Use Regulatory Commissions

The Second Regional Plan's ambitious open space program, the "Race for Open Space," helped raise public awareness of the threats to the region's natural areas and open spaces and built political support for their preservation. As a result of RPA's advocacy, several large new parks and reservations were established, including the Fire Island National Seashore, the Upper Delaware National Recreation Area, and the nation's first urban national park, Gateway National Recreation Area. At the same time, new regional land-use regulatory commissions were created for key resource areas in New Jersey: the Jersey Pinelands and the Hackensack Meadowlands. Both entities were established to manage growth in important natural areas adjoining the region's urban centers. (In addition, all three states administer coastal zone management programs and river corridor protection systems.)

The Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission (originally proposed in RPA's 1929 plan) was established in 1969 to manage growth in a thirty-one-square-mile area of marshland, landfills, and uplands adjoining the Hackensack River in Hudson and Bergen Counties just west of New York City. The commission administers land-use plans and regulations in this centrally located area, which now contains major retail, commercial, and recreational facilities, including Giants Stadium and the Continental Arena. A major feature of the commission is its tax-base sharing system, which distributes tax receipts among fourteen participating municipalities. (This is the only such district of its kind in the New York region and one of only a handful in the country.)

In 1980 the New Jersey Pinelands Commission was established to regulate development in this vast natural area at the metropolitan area's southern edge. The political impetus for the commission's creation came from a severe drought in the early 1960s that left the northern urbanized portion of the state seriously short of drinking water. The Pinelands contained a vast reserve of pristine groundwater that could be used as a backup water supply for the state's growing northern and central areas. The area also had unique natural, scenic, agricultural, and historic resources that were threatened by an expanding Philadelphia metropolitan area and resort and second-home development.

Governor Brendan Byrne and a state legislature dominated by metropolitan interests forced the commission on local communities, despite their strenuous opposition. The commission adopted a stringent plan for growth management in the Pinelands and imposed it on the municipalities of the region. Virtually all new development and subdivision activity now requires permits from the Pinelands commission, which continues to be dominated by the governor's appointees.

The Third Regional Plan

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a series of threats to the region's economic prospects, environment, and social order led civic, business, and community leaders to the conclusion that the region's quality of life and well-being were at risk. After the 1987 stock market crash, the economy of the New York region suffered its worst economic slowdown since the Great Depression, ultimately losing almost 10 percent of its employment base by 1993. Even the region's mainstay industries—financial and business services, media, and advanced technology clusters—lost national market share, convincing business and civic leaders that the region's economic health was at risk. Meanwhile, the region was attracting an influx of immigrants, most of them people of color from third world countries, causing concern about further racial and social polarization in the region. Finally, a series of environmental controversies emerged during this period over the impacts of sprawl on public watersheds, estuaries, and forests. As a result of these issues, RPA's board decided in 1989 to prepare its Third Regional Plan, *A Region at Risk*, which was completed in 1996.[5] The plan called for a twenty-five-year, $75 billion program to invest in infrastructure, the environment, education, and cities as a prerequisite for the region's continued competitiveness and quality of life. Key policy and investment recommendations included

— expansion of the regional rail network and integration of several subway and commuter rail lines into a regional express ("Rx") system to accommodate forecasted increases in travel demand in a region with little unused highway or transit capacity;

— creation of a vast new metropolitan "greensward" of protected natural resource systems that could preserve water supplies, ecological resources, and recreational opportunities while serving as a "green edge to growth" (in effect a regional growth boundary);

— economic development focused on New York City and an expanded network of "regional downtowns," including the former metropolitan centers designated in the Second Plan as well as new suburban centers.

The plan attempted to demonstrate these new approaches either by documenting their success in other world centers or through pilot projects. RPA has found that the successful application of a new policy or technique in one state can often be replicated in another.

A Region at Risk also proposed several improvements to the regional governance system.[6]

Reform of Existing Authorities

The plan proposed that existing authorities, in particular the Port Authority and MTA, be reformed and refocused. For example, it urged that the Port Authority refocus its attention and investments on building and managing world-class airports and seaports and a proposed new trans-Hudson freight tunnel. This recommendation has been largely implemented, primarily as a result of New York governor George Pataki's strong advocacy. The Port Authority is now pursuing the sale of the World Trade Center and disposal of industrial parks, urban renewal projects, and a number of other extraneous programs.

The Third Plan also recommended that if existing institutions were unwilling or unable to finance or build a regional express and other infrastructure systems (and the jury is still out), two new institutions should be established to complete them. A new "regional transportation authority" would be established to coordinate development and manage the tri-state rail, bridge, and tunnel system. This system and other infrastructure improvements would be financed by a proposed new "tri-state infrastructure bank," which would use the proceeds from dedicated transportation taxes, fares, and tolls to finance these systems. No action has been taken on these recommendations to date; however, the debate now beginning over the MTA's 2000–2005 capital program, the failure of Governor Whitman's proposed transportation program, and Connecticut's gas-tax reductions and disinvestment in its transportation systems may stimulate action.

State Planning and Smart Growth

The Third Regional Plan strongly supported implementation of New Jersey's incentive-based State Development and Redevelopment Plan, adopted in 1992 after an intensive process of "cross-acceptance" between state, county, and municipal governments. Unfortunately, the lengthy period required for its adoption meant that the plan was not executed by the same state officials who created it. Furthermore, a deep recession severely limited the state's discretionary spending. Without funding, it became an incentive-based plan that could provide few incentives for its implementation by municipalities. For example, Maryland's incentive-based smart-growth program makes an approved municipal plan a prerequisite for state school or transportation funds; under its state planning program, New Jersey offers only a vague promise of increased eligibility for these funds for communities with designated centers.

In 1998, at the urging of RPA and other civic groups, Governor Christine Todd Whitman strongly endorsed strengthening the 1992 state plan and increasing the incentives required to promote its implementation. Whitman also proposed other measures called for in the Third Plan to reclaim urban brownfields, improve transit, and preserve open space.

In New York State in the early 1990s, RPA promoted the establishment of a state growth management system. However, lack of political interest, coupled with the state's deep recession at the time, prevented action on this proposal. Recently, the New York State Council of Mayors endorsed legislation to create a "smart growth" or incentive-based state planning system. Although the resulting smart-growth legislation failed in the 1999 legislative session, Governor Pataki is expected to issue an executive order requiring that state agency actions be guided by smart-growth principles. In addition, discussions have begun in Long Island on the need for a regional growth management system there. These related movements could lead to some kind of improved state or regional planning system for New York.

In Connecticut a civic coalition convened by RPA in the early 1990s advocated improvements to put teeth into the state's advisory Conservation and Development Plan. Only a small portion of this agenda was put into effect, including new requirements that municipalities update their master plans every ten years and that state agency investments and permits be consistent with the plan.

Compact-Based Land-Use Commissions

RPA's Third Plan called for the creation of a vast, new greensward of protected natural systems encompassing the region's green infrastructure of estuaries, mountains, rivers, forests, and public water supplies, creating a permanent green edge to growth in the region. By the early

1990s, however, it was clear that the region's current elected leadership would not support "top-down" regional land-use regulatory systems such as those developed for the Adirondacks or the Jersey Pinelands in the 1970s and 1980s. Instead, a new "bottom-up" or compact-based planning model emerged in the region, first in the Hudson River Greenway and later in Long Island's Central Pine Barrens and New York City's vast upstate watershed system. These systems built on the experience in Cape Cod and other regions, where new bottom-up land-use regulatory systems were developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The Long Island Central Pine Barrens Commission was established in 1993 to manage growth in 100,000 acres of Suffolk County in eastern Long Island. This area has the island's largest reserve of pure groundwater available as a drinking water supply; it also contains the state's largest concentration of rare species and plant communities. The commission was created through a bottom-up process of planning and advocacy by dozens of environmental, business, and civic groups, including RPA, after years of litigation by environmental groups over proposed development. Four of the five commission members are chief elected officials of the participating towns and Suffolk County. The commission's regulations went into effect only when all three affected municipalities adopted implementing laws called for in the Comprehensive Management Plan for the region. The management plan provides provisions for improved land-use regulation, land acquisition, and transfers of development rights required to preserve this important natural resource system.

A less structured system was established in 1996 to manage growth and preserve water quality in the one-million-acre New York City watershed, which provides drinking water to 9 million city and suburban customers. In return for city financing of local economic development and infrastructure, watershed communities have agreed to new land-use regulations and conservation land acquisition administered and financed by the city to protect water quality. As a result, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has waived the Safe Drinking Water Act requirement that the city filter its water supply; this has allowed the city to avoid investing an estimated $6 billion in a filtration plant.

Education Finance Reform

The Third Regional Plan proposed that the states assume the cost of public primary and secondary education, both to address inequities between urban and suburban schools and to reduce incentives for "fiscal zoning"—zoning regulations primarily designed to increase tax revenue by attracting new tax development. Since education expenses represent more than two-thirds of most municipal budgets, shifting education finance to broad-based, state-collected taxes achieves most of the objectives that might otherwise be achieved through regional tax-base sharing.

When the Third Regional Plan was released in 1996, New Jersey and New York faced legal challenges to their education finance systems, with plaintiffs arguing that these systems relied on inequitable real estate property taxes favoring well-to-do suburban schools over center-city schools. In Connecticut's *Sheff* v. *O'Neill* lawsuit, plaintiffs representing inner-city parents argued successfully that the state's balkanized school districts resulted in racial segregation of urban schools, in violation of the state constitution.[7] However, they did not claim that the state's education finance system—in which the state pays for most urban education expenses—violated the constitution.

In the spring of 1998, the New Jersey Supreme Court found in favor of Governor Whitman's school finance reform plan, whereby the state provides additional funds to urban schools and sets new statewide standards for educational achievement. No action has been taken in New York or Connecticut to reform their school finances, although Connecticut's limited response to the *Sheff* decision may still lead to further litigation over this issue.

Restructuring Municipal Government

By the early 1990s, the regional governance system had grown in size and complexity from the 1,400 governments described in Robert Wood's 1959 study to 2,000 governmental units, including more than 800 general-purpose municipal governments.[8] This growth was due to both the region's expansion from twenty-two to thirty-one counties and the proliferation of special-service districts and general-purpose municipal governments.

New York State, in particular, has seen a proliferation of very small incorporated villages, established in many cases to control growth and exclude low- or moderate-income housing through new village zoning ordinances. Extreme examples of this phenomenon are the incorporated resort villages of Dering Harbor and Westhampton Dunes, both located on islands off eastern Long Island. The towns are unique in that they have no year-round residents. Dering Harbor does, however, have an employee whose job it is to raise and lower the village's flag. And Westhampton Dunes, which was incorporated to promote new public shore erosion control projects required to protect its million-dollar-plus vacation homes, may have no permanent residents, but it does have lawyers and lobbyists.

RPA went into the planning process determined to find ways to limit the growth in local government and even to eliminate or consolidate some of the existing 800 municipalities. It soon became clear that this would be difficult or impossible to achieve. As a part of the process, RPA participated in several county planning projects where this issue was raised, but then dropped. In suburban Westchester County, RPA staffed a task force that investigated local government, school finance, and administrative reform, in partnership with an accounting firm that quantified with great authority the costs of the county's extremely decentralized system of schools and municipal government.

With a million residents, Westchester has dozens of school districts and incorporated villages, towns and cities, many of them with overlapping or inefficiently delivered services. The county's resulting high property taxes are a major concern to residents, particularly in those communities with the smallest school populations. But public forums on the issue and RPA's own public opinion surveys determined that suburban residents would fight attempts to consolidate or eliminate school districts or general-purpose local governments.

Most suburbanites, it turns out, were quite satisfied with the quality of schools and other services being delivered by their towns and villages; in most cases they moved to these places to gain access to these very services. Moreover, they viewed the accountability of local officials to their needs as a fundamental and inviolable right. Consequently, citizens made it clear that they would strenuously oppose any proposals to eliminate or reduce the autonomy or accountability of their own municipality or school system.

For this reason RPA did not propose the abolition or consolidation of general-purpose municipal governments. Instead, the Third Regional Plan proposed that the states provide new incentives for service sharing among political jurisdictions, particularly for less politically volatile services such as fire protection, composting, wastewater treatment, recycling, and solid waste disposal. Indeed, there have been a number of successful examples of service sharing in Westchester and other suburban counties in all of these functional areas.

Although the plan also supports consolidation of school districts and other more politically sensitive services, there have been few successful examples of service sharing involving communities of widely divergent ethnic, social, or economic characteristics. In September 1998 New Jersey governor Christine Whitman endorsed proposals by a special state commission to consolidate administrative, transportation, and other services among school districts. Even this modest proposal will undoubtedly face strenuous opposition from suburban town and school officials and their legislative representatives.

The Third Regional Plan did promote private initiatives to provide affordable housing, based on the successful experience of Fairfield 2000 Homes, an outgrowth of RPA's Fairfield 2000 plan in Connecticut.[9]

Reactions and Early Results

A number of critics have questioned the validity of a comprehensive plan today, in an era when the region's political leaders seem less interested than ever in taking a regional perspective. Others have questioned whether an elite organization like RPA and its relatively unrepresentative group of business and civic leaders have the right to propose policies for an increasingly diverse region.

Despite these reservations, the plan has produced important results, particularly as a catalyst for investments in transit infrastructure and open space protection and for creative thinking about the shape and function of urban and suburban centers. Several major cities and edge cities are now basing new master plans on its recommendations. In much of the region, transportation policies and investments are being guided by its principles.

In several cases new civic coalitions have formed to advocate implementation of the plan's major investment and policy recommendations. These include

— the Coastal Corridor Coalition: This group of eleven business, civic, and environmental groups, including RPA, has developed a strategy for managing transportation demands in Connecticut's I-95 corridor from New Haven to Greenwich. Governor Rowland and the state's department of transportation have adopted the coalition's major recommendations, including its goal of attaining a 5 percent reduction in peak-period traffic volumes by 2005.

— the East End Initiative: This group of environmental organizations has successfully promoted creation of land banks in all five of Long Island's East End towns. It now is working on other proposals to preserve open space, agriculture, and rural character in this threatened resort area.

— the Empire State Transportation Alliance: This new coalition of business, labor, environmental, and civic groups is promoting long-term investment in New York State's transportation systems, with a special focus on financing the Third Regional Plan's transit recommendations.

The *New York Times,* other newspapers (including those serving the region's minorities, such as the *Amsterdam News*), and other media have editorialized in favor of the plan and its recommendations. In addition, all three governors have at least generally endorsed the plan's goals. New Jersey governor Christine Todd Whitman has strongly embraced the plan and incorporated its investment and policy recommendations into her second-term priorities—including proposals to strengthen the state's 1992 Development and Redevelopment Plan, preserve 1 million acres of open space, and reinvest in cities. Connecticut governor John Rowland has endorsed a new $100 million open space program called for in the plan and adopted the plan's transportation strategies as discussed above. Governor Pataki of New York has moved aggressively on the plan's open space recommendations and committed funds to build the first phase of the plan's transit development program.

Lessons Learned

The experience of the New York region over the past century, and particularly over the past decade, suggests several principles that should guide governance reform in large metropolitan areas.

Limits to Comprehensive Solutions

Reformers should not waste a lot of time or political capital on comprehensive governance solutions that look attractive on paper ("let's create a regional government") but are politically unattainable in very large multicounty or multistate regions. There may be some places where these reforms can succeed, in particular where there is bold political leadership from governors, mayors, or top business leaders. Comprehensive solutions are especially likely to succeed in smaller regions with very small minority populations, successful center cities, and long traditions of progressive civic and political leadership. Outside of these places, as Mario Cuomo used to say, "Fogetaboutit."

Metropolitan Governments, City-County Consolidation, and Annexation

Efforts to create metropolitan governments or city-county consolidations will be unrealizable in most large multicounty and multistate regions. The political obstacles to city-county consolidations were demonstrated recently in Miami, where city voters, mostly Latinos and African Americans, defeated a referendum on city-county consolidation because they feared domination by mostly white suburbs.

While annexations will continue in parts of the South and Southwest, this procedure will not be reintroduced in the other parts of the country because of the extensive incorporation of suburban areas.

Incremental Solutions

Reformers should focus on more modest initiatives that can succeed: creation of regional service districts, cost- and tax-sharing among municipalities and school districts, and area-wide land-use regulatory systems. Efforts to improve regional transit, park systems, water quality, or cultural institutions can produce tangible results and build support for broader regional initiatives. Reformers should bear in mind, however, that virtually no place has succeeded in creating regional authorities or districts that provide sensitive, "close-to-home" social services such as schools or affordable housing.

Tax-Base Sharing

Metropolitan or multijurisdictional tax sharing has succeeded in only a handful of places, notably Minneapolis–St. Paul and in New Jersey's Hackensack Meadowlands. Myron Orfield's experience in the Twin Cities and other places provides hope that coalitions of center cities and inner-ring suburbs can move such initiatives through reluctant state legislatures.[10] Similar coalitions are forming in metropolitan

Chicago and Cleveland.[11] But the political obstacles to regional tax-base sharing will remain formidable.

On the other hand, recent experiences in Michigan, Washington, Texas, Illinois, and Vermont demonstrate that state initiatives to reform school finances can succeed, achieving many of the same goals advanced for metropolitan tax-base sharing.[12] Most of these reform efforts have shifted school finances—the largest share of municipal budgets—from local property taxes to broad-based state taxes.

Consolidation of Multiple Communities

Consolidation of general-purpose municipal governments or school districts will be extremely difficult to achieve. Instead, the focus of reform efforts should be on service sharing between communities or school districts. Municipalities will join regional service districts if it is in their own interests, particularly if the services are not politically sensitive and if their neighbors share similar demographic and economic characteristics. They may, for example, share purchasing or fire-fighting equipment, but they will not share classrooms unless the communities are similar in ethnicity and income. States can and should provide incentives for service sharing, as Governor Whitman has recently proposed.

Living with Multiple States or Counties

Although having multiple states or counties within a single metropolitan area makes governance more difficult, it also creates opportunities for experimentation. In New York the bad news is that the metropolitan region consists of three states; but the good news also is that the region consists of three states. Each state functions as a laboratory for governance innovations of all kinds. New Jersey's brownfield reclamation program, for example, is a model for the other two states. New York's regional school districts and cooperative education system are a model for the others, and so on. Having a model in one state often makes replication possible in the others.

Public Authorities

Creation of regional service districts and authorities may be appropriate for some multijurisdictional metropolitan areas. In some places this is already occurring: Portland Metro emerged from the amalgamation of several single-purpose service districts. It does not always work this way, however. Boston's Metropolitan District Commission, an early twentieth-century amalgamation of regional park, sewer, and water districts, failed to sustain broad public support, and through the 1970s and 1980s, it was stripped of its independence and most of its authority.

Most metropolitan areas already have limited regional service districts—airport, seaport, highway, water, sewer, or solid waste districts—that could be expanded or redirected to better serve the needs of growing regions. In most cases these do not, however, span state borders. Even in metropolitan Portland, for example, separate port authorities compete with each other on opposite sides of the Columbia River. (A dialogue is now underway, however, that could improve coordination of their activities.) The experience of Chicago's regional toll road authority illustrates two of the shortcomings of many regional authorities: (1) it operates only in the Illinois portion of the metropolitan area, even though it serves commuters traveling to and from suburban areas in Indiana and Wisconsin; and (2) its ambitious highway-building program and the sprawl it generates run counter to the interests of transit and environmental advocates (and its decisions are not subject to direct political control by the voters).

Public Sector versus Civic Leadership

Through much of this century, powerful governors, mayors, and aggressive authority executives provided bold public sector leadership on metropolitan governance, infrastructure, and land-use issues. In taking courageous action on unpopular issues, governors such as Al Smith and Nelson Rockefeller, mayors such as Fiorello LaGuardia and Robert Wagner, and bureaucrats such as Robert Moses and Austin Tobin represented true "profiles in courage." Their actions frequently put them far out in front of public opinion, and when required they took controversial and unpopular actions that they felt were in the public interest. In this context, the role of civic groups was to provide legitimacy for bold public action and not infrequently, to attempt to rein in overreaching public officials. But rarely did civic leaders have to instigate public action.

Since the 1980s, in New York and across the country a different model of public leadership has emerged in which many elected and appointed leaders take initiative only when it is politically safe to do so. (It should be noted that the voters who elect these leaders are apparently comfortable with this new mode of leadership or "followership.") The civic sector has filled the resulting leadership vacuum and now serves as instigator and advocate for public action. Individual civic leaders or coalitions of civic groups have been essential catalysts for virtually all of the New York region's major governance initiatives in recent years. In this context, one of New York's special advantages is its "civic infrastructure": literally thousands of community, environmental, business, and other advocacy groups. Their job is to exhort politicians and bureaucrats on to action, although not infrequently they must also work to rein in overly ambitious public officials.

A valid criticism of the region's civic leadership is that in many cases it represents elite groups and interests such as corporations. The Regional Plan Association is now trying to include grassroots community and environmental groups in civic coalitions, both to broaden their representation and to increase their political clout.

A growing number of other regions have groups similar to RPA. Notable among these are Chicago's Metropolitan Planning Council and a new group being established to promote implementation of the Commercial Club's new regional plan for Chicago. The council's membership, funding base, and outlook are similar to RPA's: its board represents a cross-section of city and suburban business, civic, and academic leaders, and a majority of its budget comes from its members, both corporate and noncorporate.

Eco-City Cleveland has become an effective voice for a metropolitan outlook in greater Cleveland and has helped convene a new statewide coalition of older suburbs to promote a smart-growth plan for Ohio. San Francisco's Greenbelt Alliance has moved beyond advocacy for open space acquisition to successful promotion of urban growth boundaries and other growth management techniques. Finally, the dozens of smart-growth advocacy groups now emerging across the country have the potential to mature into permanent voices for more effective metropolitan planning and governance.

Across the country a score of "thousand friends" groups have been established at the state level to push for improved land-use, environmental, and transportation policies. The first of these, 1,000 Friends of Oregon, was established in 1975 by Governor Tom McCall and Henry Richmond, then the director of Oregon's Public Interest Research Group. The intent was to ensure a strong civic voice in the implementation of Oregon's visionary growth management act.[13] In Oregon and elsewhere, these groups have played a critical role in providing a strong base of public support for adoption and implementation of similar programs.

The Role of Regional Plans

Every large metropolitan region in the country has a metropolitan planning organization, usually established to fulfill federal transportation-planning requirements. Most MPOs are creatures of state transportation departments, which provide the vast majority of their funds and control appointments to their boards and technical advisory committees. Others answer to municipal governments, which control their boards of directors. In both cases, these groups are reluctant to propose radical actions or investments that might threaten the status quo of their powerful (and usually cautious) state or local leadership.

In a handful of places such as Portland, MPOs are more progressive and representative of regional interests; these have adopted bold plans that represent the interests of the metropolitan region. More typical is New York's experience with its Tri-State Regional Planning Commission: this group rarely went beyond advocacy for the projects proposed by its member agencies. In fact, the commission's espousal of fair-share housing for the region helped lead to its demise when Connecticut dropped out, in part due to this contentious issue.

In large regions like New York that lack metropolitan government or public regional plans, civic planning groups such as RPA can provide long-range plans that catalyze and guide public action and investment. As noted earlier, several other regions now have civic groups that are developing similar plans.

The Three Ts: Things Take Time

In very large and complex metropolitan regions, bold enterprises, including construction of major infrastructure systems or creation of new institutions, can take decades to plan or execute. In New York some proposals of RPA's first and second regional plans, such as the protection of Sterling Forest, took several decades to implement. Luckily, the region and its economic and environmental systems are remarkably resilient and can tolerate these delays. Civic leaders must be in it for the long haul and must create civic groups with the staying power to act when political opportunities present themselves.

The Three Ps: Persistence, Patience, and Perseverance

This principle relates to the one just described: successful civic leaders must persist, sometimes over very long periods of time. They must wait patiently until the opportunities—the right combination of threat, leadership, funding, and vision—come along or can be created. And they must persevere despite occasional setbacks.

Conclusion

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the New York metropolitan region has never had, and probably never will have, a neat, tidy organization chart or a highly structured, coherent system of regional and local governance. In this respect it is similar to other great world centers, including London and Tokyo, and to the largest U.S. metropolitan regions, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Washington, Boston, or Atlanta. None of these places have metropolitan governments that encompass their entire regions, although some, including Boston and Atlanta, do have effective regional planning agencies.

The New York region's continued deep political and social divisions and strong tradition of local home rule will likely prevent the creation of a general-purpose regional government or the consolidation of the region's decentralized municipal governments in the foreseeable future. Regional tax-base sharing almost certainly will not occur in the near term. And the area's growing racial and ethnic diversity will continue to impede regional solutions to pressing social needs such as school integration or construction of significant amounts of affordable housing in the suburbs. Similar circumstances are also present in virtually every other large U.S. metropolitan region.

But on a number of occasions in this century, and particularly over the past decade, the New York region has had effective regional leadership when major opportunities or threats to its well-being have arisen. Several times in this century, strong, visionary leaders have emerged to create new authorities or other institutions or to make major investments needed to safeguard the region's interest. In every generation public entrepreneurs like Robert Moses or governors like

Nelson Rockefeller have come forward to provide this leadership and have gained regional support for bold public action. In each case the region's civic leaders also have come forward to support and sustain these efforts (and as in the case of Moses, have subsequently worked to slow or reverse excesses).

Thus despite the New York region's lack of an efficient, well-coordinated regional governance system, it continues to be a very successful and livable place. It remains the center of U.S. and world business, finance, culture, and communications and has an economy of nearly three-quarters of a trillion dollars, making it perhaps the wealthiest metropolitan region in the world. Its public transportation system carries a growing share (more than a third) of total U.S. transit ridership, and it retains a wide diversity of communities, many with the highest property values and incomes in the country.

Much remains to be done to improve economic prospects and living conditions for the region's growing minority and immigrant populations, to increase the skills of its work force, to manage sprawl at its edges, and to create new capacity for growth in its communities and infrastructure. These are the goals of the Regional Plan Association's Third Regional Plan. The region's future vitality and livability will depend on its success in dealing with these concerns.

From this experience it is possible to conclude that it is not necessary to have a regional government or a well-ordered organization chart for very large, multijurisdictional, and multistate metropolitan regions. Furthermore, incrementalism may be the only way to proceed in these places. Finally, while bold *political* leadership is essential, of equal importance to the success of these places is patient, persistent, and effective *civic* leadership.

Notes

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11. From author's interviews with Mary Sue Barrett, president, Metropolitan Planning Council and Judy Rawson, city councilor, Shaker Heights, Ohio.

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