FEDERAL LIVABILITY FRAMEWORK: A CENTRAL ROLE FOR REGIONS

NARC

Building Regional Communities

Prepared by:
The National Association of Regional Councils
1666 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20009
202.986.1032 phone
202.986.1038 fax
www.NARC.org

Executive Summary

> *"…Our communities are growing and changing. And too often, our approach to community development policy has been like one of those cars on the Merritt Parkway – trapped in gridlock, never moving. It's time to re-think the way we plan the futures of the places we live, work, and raise our kids."*
>
> – The Honorable Christopher Dodd, Chairman, Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, June 16, 2009

The **National Association of Regional Councils** (NARC), representing multi-jurisdictional regional planning organizations and their local elected officials, encourages federal opportunities that provide incentives for regions to plan comprehensive future growth in a coordinated way that reduces congestion, generates good-paying jobs, meets our environmental and energy goals, protects rural areas and green space, revitalizes our Main Streets and urban centers, creates and preserves affordable housing, and makes our communities better places to live, work and raise families. Regional planning organizations are the conduit by which this can happen.

Now is the time to reinvigorate a federal commitment to regional comprehensive planning through a livability program that crosses multiple federal agencies and patches together planning requirements to provide a more holistic approach to solving current challenges. NARC recommends this new Congressional effort:

- reaffirm the federal role in regionalism;
- coordinate regional assistance programs;
- conduct federal interagency meetings;
- determine federal livability goals;
- establish competitive comprehensive regional planning grants;
- incentivize coordination among local and regional activities;
- improve data collection, research, evaluation and analysis;
- ensure land use/zoning requirements do not impede upon local decision-making; and,
- provide for transparency, accountability and replicability.

NARC looks forward to working with Congress, the Administration, the appropriate federal agencies and association partners to determine how regions can be the leader in promoting the goals of the federal livability agenda, while helping restore economic prosperity in our nation's communities and foster partnerships and innovative practices that make each region a great place to live, play, work and invest.

At a Glance

Introduction

Understanding Regional Planning Organizations

A Brief History of Regional Planning
- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Environment
- Federally-Recognized Plans
- Clinton-Gore Effort

Current State of Play
- Administration
- Congress

Looking to a Regional Future

Conclusion

Appendix I: Regional Examples
- San Diego Association of Governments
- Denver Regional Council of Governments
- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
- Atlanta Regional Commission
- Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
- Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission
- Michiana Area Council of Governments
- Green River Area Development District
- Metropolitan Area Planning Council
- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- Centralina Council of Governments
- Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
- Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission
- Brazos Valley Council of Governments
- Wasatch Front Regional Council

Appendix II: Acronyms

Introduction

The **National Association of Regional Councils** (NARC), representing multi-jurisdictional regional planning organizations and their local elected officials, strongly supports promoting and establishing a federal Livability Initiative aimed at linking federal planning processes across departmental lines to strengthen U.S. communities and to foster sustainable development and economic growth. Many regions and their local governments have, in fact, been working for years to develop comprehensive plans and to coordinate and integrate their activities to accomplish the goals of those plans. The time has come for the federal government to begin to reward and incentivize these regional efforts, and to recognize the role of regions in stimulating and sustaining local economies and communities. This new effort must include regions and regional organizations, who are uniquely suited to leverage federal assistance programs across issue and geographic areas, can scale up programs and deliver assistance to multiple jurisdictions efficiently, weaving together localities and neighborhoods in a common mission that improves connectivity and commerce, transportation choices, housing and job opportunities, and long-term environmental health and well being.

NARC offers its assistance to Congress and the Administration in developing a framework for a federal livability agenda and program that draws upon and bolsters already in place regional planning organizations to encourage sustainable growth, economic development and new opportunities by cross-linking fundamental planning and implementation functions. Please consider our recommendations for how this initiative can best meet federal, regional, state and local needs.

Understanding Regional Planning Organizations

The challenges we face today – be it job loss, economic competitiveness, neighborhood stabilization, environmental pollution or climate change – require creative solutions that draw on the concentrated talents and productivity of our nation's regions and metropolitan areas. Regional job markets, housing markets, industrial clusters, transportation systems, schools, energy systems, cultural amenities and ecological resources connect multiple localities in a common future. Tight local budgets further call for regional approaches that pool together resources, data, and public/private partners in developing integrated solutions. Such approaches can improve service quality and save money at the same time.

The collaboration of cities, counties, towns, townships and even states across physical and political boundaries provides the ingenuity to tackle the challenges of the 21st Century. Regional planning organizations are the natural unit to address the complex and interconnected opportunities we face – and to plan for long-term change and growth. Regional planning organizations – which include councils of governments (COGs), regional planning agencies (RPAs), metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), economic development districts (EDDs) and regional development organizations – are multi-jurisdictional, multi-purpose organizations that deliver an array of federal, state and local programs that provide planning support and technical assistance to local governments. Increasingly, they are being called upon to implement regional programs such as regional land use planning, delivery of municipal services and group purchasing. Some regional planning organizations have been created by compact and enabling legislation, and some are a voluntary consortia of local governments that

have come together with the recognition that problems spill beyond jurisdictional boundaries and can best be addressed by multiple localities acting together.

Regional planning organizations continuously maintain and improve our nation's communities by fostering innovative solutions that provide sustainability to regions through strategic design, creative partnerships, crosslinking community needs.

Councils of Governments (COGs) and *Regional Development Organizations* compose the national network of 520 multi-jurisdictional (and, in some cases, multi-state), local government-based planning and development organizations, including the network of 380 Economic Development Districts (EDDs) designated by the Economic Development Agency (EDA).

Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs) are established by state law to coordinate planning and, often, service delivery across municipal lines. Their members always include municipal officials, but can also include state and agency representatives as well as other regional stakeholders.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) refer to the national network of 385 organizations established through federal transportation law (U.S. Code Title 23, Chapter 1, Section 134) to serve as the lead transportation planning organizations for areas with a population of 50,000 or more. Of the existing MPOs, about half are administered, housed or staffed by a COG, with the remaining MPOs operated within a state, county or city planning office or by a stand-alone nonprofit entity. In a minority of cases, MPOs are largely governed by the state.

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) means any region in the United States designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) as an Economic Development District under §304.1 of 13 CFR Ch. III (or such regulation as was previously in effect before the effective date of this section) and also includes any economic development district designated as such under section 403 of the Public Works and and Economic Development Act (PWEDA), as in effect on February 10, 1999.

A Brief History of Regional Planning

Spurred by population growth and development following World War II, comprehensive planning gained significant attention by the federal government in the 1950's and was sustained through the 1960's and 1970's with the adoption of Section 701 of the Housing Act of 1954. The Housing Act of 1954 authorized the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Section 701 Comprehensive Planning Grant program, providing funding to multi-purpose regional planning organizations throughout the country. The Section 701 grant program required local governments applying for urban renewal assistance to adopt, set and develop long-range general plans. During the years (the 1970s) in which HUD was most active in urban development, the average annual appropriation rose from $25 million to more than $125 million (about $300 million in today's dollars). However, during the 1980s, regional programs began to lose their federal funding cache among Congress and the various administrations, and funding for the Section 701 program was eliminated. Yet, other regionally-focused transportation, economic development and environment programs survived.

Transportation

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962 required, as a condition of federal fiscal assistance, that jurisdictions within urbanized areas with more than 50,000 people must plan for regional transportation planning expenditures cooperatively with other jurisdictions in the region. This requirement gave birth to regionally-focused transportation planning in the form of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). As the nation grew, more and more areas became urbanized and exceeded the 50,000-person threshold, with the number of MPOs increasing from 225 to 385 between 1965 and 2005. When the U.S. Census Bureau determines the population threshold has been met, a new MPO is formed by the appropriate state legislatures. MPOs can adopt a variety of monikers—such as Transportation Councils, Metropolitan Councils or Transportation Committees, and about half of all MPOs are co-located or co-staffed by the region's Council of Governments (COG).

In 1991, Congress pulled together all of the highway and transit programs into the Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act (ISTEA), which largely retained the system of state and metropolitan planning and continued regional MPO activities with new duties assigned. ISTEA has been reauthorized twice, and most recently in 2005 with the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act-a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). All three bills reaffirm MPOs as an important partner in regional transportation planning processes.

Economic Development

A healthy national economy depends on creating robust regional and local economies. Federal agencies, such as the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) (within U.S. Department of Commerce), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Small Business Administration (SBA), have opened the doors for more regional economic development. EDA is one of the few federal agencies solely focused on private sector job growth and serves as a critical resource to distressed communities striving to improve local economics through bottoms-up economic development strategies with infrastructure grants, strategic planning assistance, business development capital or technical assistance. EDA programs are an invaluable resource to our communities to implement regional strategies that promote innovation and competitiveness. EDA's role in creating and maintaining jobs while stimulating industrial and commercial growth in economically distressed areas, both urban and rural, is critical to the sustainability of our regions and local governments, many of whom are facing fiscal budget restraints. EDA programs are also flexible, allowing funding to be applied towards long-term economic development planning, as well as sudden and severe economic distress, meeting the nation's needs on multiple levels through one comprehensive program.

In its process, EDA federally designates Economic Development Districts (EDDs) to be responsible for developing, monitoring and updating a region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). These public-sector, EDA-approved plans for economic development are used as a guide in grant awards for water and sewer infrastructure systems, technology training centers, telecommunications facilities, research parks and other major public-works projects. The EDA grants for infrastructure development, local capacity building and business development help the communities served by an EDD to alleviate conditions of substantial and persistent unemployment and underemployment in economically distressed areas.

EDA is known for its cost-effective programs, efficient investment of federal resources, creation and retention of jobs, generation of important tax revenues in distressed communities, and tools to achieve regional and global competitiveness. Over the years, however, agencies like EDA have struggled to maintain authorizations and adequate funding levels to assist regional economic development.

The meager dollars allocated through EDA have a huge return on investment and are critical to the growth of regions. EDA's well-planned, coordinated strategies for public priorities in economic development have proven to be a sound use of public dollars.

Within housing efforts, federal housing programs with inherent local and regional benefits have been grossly underfunded considering the growing need, including, but are not limited to, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Brownfields Economic Development Initiative (BEDI), Rural Housing and Economic Development (RHED) and Community Development Loan Guarantee Program. These types of HUD programs, which should not function in a vacuum, are vital to community planning, development, sustainability and progress. America's communities need to be able to compete in a global marketplace, and maintaining HUD programs is essential for continued prosperity and success for American businesses, communities and families.

Environment

There are many federally-directed environmental programs that take advantage of the regional approach, understanding that environmental concerns do not stop at state or jurisdictional boundaries. One such program, Sec. 208 Water Quality Management Planning (WQM), was facilitated through the Clean Water Act (CWA) of 1972. Sec. 208 set forth a program whereby substate, "areawide" Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs) analyzed nonpoint source pollution and develop WQM plans focused on controlling those sources and attaining water quality standards. WQM plans are equivalent to air quality management plans for implementing ambient air quality standards under the Clean Air Act.

These areawide or regional plans are essentially watershed management plans, which are ideal for addressing the many impacts on and arranging mitigation for vital water resources. Regional or areawide WQM planning is the link between water quality standards, permitting, best management practices and other control measures. RPOs, which often develop these plans, bring local government, water districts, watershed organizations and other stakeholders together to prepare watershed and regional plans to achieve water quality standards. These plans then identify management actions and best practices by local governments and other public agencies. These WQM plans, prepared by RPOs, have an increasingly important role in many growing areas, including, but not limited to: stormwater management, watershed management, green infrastructure, asset management, data management, educational programs for communities and low impact development.

True federal funding through Section 208 has not been realized since the 1980s. Some RPOs receive a pass through of state funds or raise revenue to cover this type of planning.

Federally-Recognized Plans

As described in the above narratives, the federal government authorizes nine federal Departments and five independent Agencies to compile regionally focused policy, but has not required coordination to achieve federal goals. The federally-required plans that RPOs undertake include, but are not limited to: Financially Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plans (MPOs); State Implementation Plans (EPA Air Quality prepared by states but include sections on each individual non-attainment regions within a state); Transportation Improvement Plans (MPOs); Watershed Plans; Water Quality Management Plans; and, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plans (EDDs). Many RPOs find that federally required plans do not generally enhance a region's concept of livability due to the stove-piped or siloed nature of the actions they inform or generate.

Clinton-Gore Effort

The 1999 Clinton-Gore Livability Agenda was introduced to help American communities grow, ensuring a high quality of life and strong, sustainable economic prosperity. A billion dollar initiative, the Agenda sought to strengthen the federal government's role as a partner with the increasing number of state and local efforts to build "livable communities" for the 21st Century. Key elements of the interagency initiative – highlighted in President Clinton's proposed fiscal year 2000 budget – included:

- provide communities with new tools and resources to preserve green space;
- ease traffic congestion; and,
- pursue regional "smart growth" strategies.

One key proposal of the Agenda was the "Regional Connections Initiative," which sought to promote regional "smart growth" strategies and to complement the Administration's other regional efforts. In order to carry out the Agenda, the Clinton Administration looked to work with and learn from states, communities, and other stakeholders, and to develop new strategies that provide additional tools and resources. They sought to influence local land use decisions through a $50 million HUD program, offering matching funds for local partnerships to design and pursue smarter growth strategies across jurisdictional lines, while integrating the commitments of more than a dozen federal agencies. This effort would also have aimed to supplement the Administration's Community Empowerment Agenda, which was designed to encourage reinvestment in existing communities to provide greater opportunity for their residents.

Current State of Play

Previous Congresses, administrations and federal agencies have recognized the positive externalities that arise from regional efforts through the authorization (and successive reauthorizations) of important regionally-focused programs. MPOs and their regional transportation planning work are a good example of a federal commitment with funding to regional integrated planning empowered by a layered level of decision making from local governments and their elected officials representing American communities – urban and rural, large and small. Due to efforts like these, it has become increasingly apparent that a community's overall health and welfare is dependent on the successful integration of planning for mobility and accessibility, infrastructure, economic development and environmental resource protection. The time has come to place as much national emphasis on strategic and coordinated regional economic, environmental, land use and housing planning and implementation as is placed on the planning and implementation of our transportation investments.

Administration

The Obama Administration has expressed renewed interest in livability issues and is putting in place efforts to advance integrated, multiple-benefit regional planning:

1. Establishment of the White House Office for Urban Affairs. This Office is expressly tasked to break federal silos and work toward an interdisciplinary approach; take a regional approach; and, promote coordinated and strategic investments in regions, cities and neighborhoods that result in inclusive economic growth.
2. Creation of the Sustainable Communities Partnership among the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), HUD and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to involve the public in planning to ensure that housing and transportation goals are achieved while also better protecting the environment, promoting equitable development and helping to address the challenges of climate change.

3. Requests within the President's fiscal year 2010 budget to chart a long-term sustainability and resource-management course throughout the federal government, such as $150 million within HUD for the Sustainable Communities Initiative to integrate housing and transportation, and reform zoning and land use. Of that, $100 million would be geared towards Regional Planning Grants for MPOs and HUD block grant consortia. These items, and many other intermingled throughout the budget request, are laudable and integral to comprehensive regional planning that lead to livable communities.

Even as recent as 2005, HUD and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) entered into an Interagency Agreement (IAA) to help communities realize the potential demand for transit-oriented housing and to close the gap between the projected demand and planned development for housing near transit corridors in particular metropolitan regions. FTA and HUD released a report to Congress in September 2008, *Better Coordination of Transportation and Housing Programs*, outlining strategies to continue and expand coordination in the areas of mixed-income and affordable housing choices near transit. FTA is in the process of developing a *Best Practices Manual* which will provide a multi-scenario "how-to" manual for promoting development of mixed-income housing near transit. This manual will be published by December 2009.

Congress

U.S. Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT), chairman of the U.S. Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, is leading the charge on a livability effort, and has requested President Obama to create a White House Office of Sustainable Development to develop comprehensive solutions to the most pressing challenges (climate change, dependency on foreign oil, metropolitan congestion and infrastructure needs). Senator Dodd's Committee is holding briefings and informational sessions to determine how this initiative could work.

U.S. Congressman James Oberstar (D-MN), chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, outlined establishing an Office of Livability within the U.S. DOT in his recently released surface transportation authorization priorities, which may offer an opportunity to redefine how regional transportation planning occurs.

Looking to a Regional Future

The **National Association of Regional Councils** (NARC) sees great benefit from reinvigorating a federal commitment to regional comprehensive planning through a livability program that crosses multiple federal agencies, patching together planning requirements that can provide a more holistic approach to solving current housing, transportation, environmental, public safety, job creation and economic growth challenges. In some cases, this may mean rejuvenating dormant programs and, in other cases, it means expanding efforts and adding new programs. NARC recommends several actions by Congress and the Administration that leverage the power of existing RPOs to create more regionally-focused policies that can take the federal livability initiative to improve communities across America.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Reaffirm the federal role in regionalism**. Given its role in promoting fostering national commerce and preserving critical resources, the federal government should reassert an active role in supporting development and preservation in regions of all sizes – large and small, urban and rural. A strong partnership between the federal government and our nation's regions must be re-established to determine the strategies, tools, data, resources and alliances that are needed to advance innovative regional work. Regionalism is reemerging as an important and critical resource of local and state governments who need a more efficient system for delivering resources and technical assistance, and ensuring efficient land use and resource protection.

2. **Coordinate regional assistance programs**. In addition to affirming the importance of regions, the federal government should set up an interagency task force that coordinates all federal activities related to a livability initiative that puts regional planning organizations, their activities and comprehensive planning at the center. This task force would identify inconsistencies in federal policies toward regional work, and provide recommendations for how to strengthen support for meritorious programs. The federal government should re-examine federal regions and regional offices (i.e., FHWA, EDA or FEMA regions) to ensure their activities and structure best match and serve regional needs and their local government partners who are closest to the people. A key problem is inconsistency among regional offices in guidance and interpretation of national rules and regulations. Regional planning organizations should be looked to as a unifying organizational unit that can bring together multiple governmental entities, stakeholders and public and private partners, while interweaving disparate federal assistance programs into a quilt of community growth and opportunity.

3. **Conduct federal interagency meetings**. By gathering the U.S. DOT, HUD, EDA, U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), USDA, U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), U.S. Department of Commerce and the EPA in high level monthly meetings, a forum for cross-collaboration and discussion would emerge, creating the foundation for livability and comprehensive regional planning efforts that cuts across federal agency boundaries.

4. **Determine federal livability goals**. The federal government, as it has done in all program areas, should determine, in coordination with the regional planning organizations, federal livability goals for regional planning organizations and their partners to meet. These may include, but are not limited to increased and sustained economic growth, job creation, housing production and preservation, community safety, stronger environmental management (i.e., reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and management of water resources), reduced congestion, reduced costs and timeframes to complete infrastructure projects, increasing use of renewable and alternative energy sources, etc. Through the delivery of additional resources and tools, regional planning organizations should be empowered to develop appropriate solutions to carrying out such goals, in partnership with state and local government.

5. Establish competitive comprehensive regional planning grants. Through the delivery of a new source of funding for regional planning organizations, in the form of competitive grants, the federal government can invest scarce federal resources toward the creation of regional demonstration pilot projects to showcase the capacity, innovation and benefits of comprehensive regional planning and implementation. This will generate "living laboratories" upon which future federal policy and assistance programs can be built. Such grants should be flexible and multi-year in nature (four to five years), allowing for both plan development and implementation. These grants should be distributed to a diverse group of regional planning organizations – large and small, rural and urban – representing differing geographic, demographic and cultural make ups. This should be a "bottom up" and grassroots approach that informs a federal process and links the cross-purposes of various federal agencies and programs. Examples of grant criteria include:

- demonstration of an integrated approach to create/implement livable communities that addresses at least three of the following issues: environment, economic and community development, social welfare, land use, zoning, affordable housing, public safety, transportation and workforce development;
- ability to meet regional targets to help the nation to achieve critical federal goals, one region at a time;
- capability to reach consensus and a shared regional vision through public, private and non-profit sector participation;
- commitment of a more than 50 percent of local jurisdiction (local government) participation in the planning process;
- ability to consolidate services among local jurisdictions effectively and efficiently;
- use of new and innovative technologies and/or outreach and public participation strategies;
- creation of the plan implementation timeframe and strategy;
- institution of regionally-drive objectives and indicators that measure performance and success; and,
- ability to provide a reasonable level of local matching funding consistent with current economic conditions.

Funding should be allocated toward comprehensive regional planning activtiies, as well as implementation, the critical "proof of concept" phase. Implementation dollars should be consistent in order for each regional planning organization to carry out its timeframe and strategy. Both planning and implementation funding should vary based on the composition of the region and the plan's requirements.

6. Ensure land use/zoning requirements do not impede upon local decision-making. Few regional planning organizations have a direct role in land use planning. Land use decisions rightfully rest within the jurisdiction of local governments. Regional planning organizations, therefore, should not be required to undertake land use planning or zoning changes, but given additional resources to assist their local communities with land use modeling tools for regional forecasting, regional land-use assessments, various regional land-use scenarios and other areas to help improve local decision-making.

7. **Incentivize coordination among local and regional activities**. Along with establishing regional planning organization pilot programs, the federal government should look to establish incentive programs that help to join activities between multiple regional planning organizations across a single geographic area; encourage local planning and procurement to be consistent with the regional plan; and, reward regions that go above and beyond the plan's goals. This could include outreach to and capacity building for the various stakeholders; convening of expert roundtables and other forums or workshops; and, development of appropriate tools to support location efficiencies.

8. **Improve data collection, research, evaluation and analysis**. Federal data is important for all planning and public policy activities. The U.S. Census Bureau, the American Community Survey and the Economic Census are critical tools for local governments and regional planning organizations to secure funding and plan for a wide range of community and regional programs. Currently over 70 federal agencies provide data without much consistency or coordination. Federal data must be funded, streamlined and organized to ensure the quality and completeness of data activities, and assist in identifying local trends and needs. Examine establishing of a national Data Consistency Task Force to help regions, states, locals and the federal government in streamlining data terminologies, reporting, etc.

9. **Provide for transparency, accountability and replicability**. All federal programs undertaken by regional planning organizations require a great degree of transparency and accountability. This should be incorporated into the federal livability performance-based program to ensure regions meet the federal goals. Reports should be made available to Congress with regular opportunities for briefings and updates. Additionally, funding should be made available to create case studies and best practices of replicable comprehensive regional planning and livability programs.

10. **Conduct a Congressional Research Service (CRS) Study**. This study would examine the federal agencies, purposes and details of federally-required plans developed by regional planning organizations and local governments to address transportation, housing, the environment, economic and community development, public safety and other areas impacting communities to determine duplicative or cross-linked programs. Its goal should be to consolidate useful plans, to eliminate duplicative ones and to encourage a clear and central role for regional planning organization in helping to deliver plans that are mutually consistent and supporting.

Conclusion

The **National Association of Regional Councils** (NARC) looks forward to working with Congress, the Administration, the appropriate federal agencies and association partners to determine how regions can be leaders in promoting the goals of the federal livability agenda, while helping restore economic prosperity in our nation's communities and foster partnerships and innovative practices that make each region a great place to live, play, work and invest.

Appendices

Appendix I: Regional Examples

Attached are examples of NARC members and their efforts to create and implement comprehensive regional planning efforts to establish livable communities. Please contact NARC staff if you require further information on these examples or would like direct contact with any regional planning organization highlighted.

(NOTE: This is a sampling – more can be added as requested or needed.)

City, State	Organization Name	Population*
San Diego, CA region	San Diego Association of Governments	2,813,833
Denver, CO region	Denver Regional Council of Governments	2,458,701
Washington, DC region	Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments	4,211,964
Atlanta, GA region	Atlanta Regional Commission	3,850,832
Chicago, IL region	Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning	8,183,799
Gary, IN region	Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission	741,468
South Bend, IN region	Michiana Area Council of Governments	584,539
Owensboro, KY region	Green River Area Development District	207,377
Boston, MA region	Metropolitan Area Planning Council	3,066,394
Springfield, MA region	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	608,999
Charlotte, NC region	Centralina Council of Governments	1,540,714
Pittsburgh, PA region	Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission	2,656,007
Columbus, OH region	Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission	1,835,189
College Station, TX region	Brazos Valley Council of Governments	267,085
Salt Lake City, UT	Wasatch Front Regional Council	1,381,778

* Counts are based on 2000 Census.

San Diego Association of Governments

San Diego, California • www.sandag.org

San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) consists of 19 local governments and spans a region with a total population of over three million. The SANDAG *2030 Regional Growth Forecast* predicts that by the year 2030 the San Diego region will grow by approximately one million people, 290,000 new homes and roughly half a million jobs. SANDAG is the first MPO in California to update its regional plans under the historic State anti-sprawl bill, SB 375. SANDAG's *2050 Regional Transportation Plan* (RTP) is slated for adoption by the Board of Directors in July 2011. Key efforts of SANDAG's plan include:

- collaborating with the Regional Planning Technical Working Group (the region's planning directors) in order to prepare *The 2050 Regional Growth Forecast* which involves alternative growth scenarios that can be applied to forecast years after 2025;
- developing an Urban Core Transit Strategy to evaluate possible regional transit strategies that maximize peak-period transit mode share in the urban core and thereby reduce vehicle miles traveled in the region;
- developing a Sustainable Communities Strategy to show how regional greenhouse gas (GHG) targets would be achieved through development patterns, infrastructure investments, and/or transportation measures or policies that are determined to be feasible. This effort will be consistent with the housing needs and address protection of sensitive resource areas, including areas protected under Habitat Conservation Plans;
- developing the RTP Environmental Impact Report to include GHG baseline measurements and projections, as well as potential mitigation measures to reduce emissions; and,
- establishing a new Regional Planning Stakeholder Working Group to include the public in the development of the 2050 RTP.

Denver Regional Council of Governments

Denver, Colorado • www.drcog.org

Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), a nonprofit association of local governments, is dedicated to making the nine-county and 47-municipality Denver region a great place to live, work and play. As the regional planning commission for the Denver metro region, DRCOG developed *Metro Vision*, the region's current plan to guide growth, transportation and environmental quality into the future. *Metro Vision* is the foundation of all of the regional council's long-range planning activities. The goal of the plan is to protect and enhance the region's quality of life. The DRCOG Board of Directors adopted the current version of the plan, *Metro Vision 2035*, on Dec. 19, 2007.

Metro Vision includes:

- growth and development policies that influence the shape and characteristics of the urban area;
- transportation policies that address the region's roadway, rapid transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities and services;
- environmental quality policies that address air & water quality, parks and open space; and,
- implementing **Metro Vision** describes the strategies and actions to achieve the plan's goals and policies.

Through their regional comprehensive planning, DRCOG is thinking "SMART," by emphasizing **S**ustainability in the region's vision for growth and development, acting as a **M**odel for regional cooperation, **A**dvocating for the needs of seniors, establishing **R**egionalism as the best approach to problem solving, and partnering with business and industry to meet **T**ransportation needs.

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

Washington, DC • www.mwcog.org

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG), in conjunction with a coalition of civic, business and environmental stakeholders, developed *Greater Washington 2050*, a new regional initiative to improve the quality of life for Washington area residents and 21 local governments surrounding our nation's capital. The initiative is based on a two part study consisting of focus group discussions and regional telephone surveys. The report, *Priorities for a Growing Region*, serves as the public's report card of the region's performance in sixteen different categories, which are also rated on a scale of intensity to see where the public most values progress.

On the scale of intensity the residents felt the most effort should be put toward:

1. higher quality public schools;
2. safer streets and neighborhoods that are free of crime; and,
3. more good jobs for everyone who wants one

The desire for regional action was present in 43 percent of the residents surveyed, with the percentage being higher among people who chose housing and the economy as top challenges for the region. Although traffic/transportation placed highest among the most important long term issues, it fell to the middle in the intensity of public priorities list.

With these results from the study, the *Greater Washington 2050* initiative seeks to address the public's concerns for their community. It has recently developed a set of goals, to respond to the issues of land use, economic growth, environmental issues, transportation, quality of life and climate change. They are supported by broad strategies available to local governments and a set objectives and indicators to measure progress in years ahead. These goals aim to balance growth, improve quality of life and maintain a vibrant economy, while ensuring that today's residents are involved in shaping their community for future generations.

Atlanta Regional Commission

Atlanta, Georgia • www.atlantaregional.com

Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is the regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency for the 10-county Atlanta, GA metropolitan area. Their Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) is an award-winning program, designed to help planners and local governments link land use planning with transportation infrastructure in order to achieve smarter and more sustainable growth. LCI planning grants allow areas to utilize the infrastructure and private investments already in place in the community, creating more balanced regional development. The primary goals of the program include:

- connect homes, shops and offices by encouraging a diversity of mixed-income residential neighborhoods, employment and recreational choices at the center/corridor level;
- provide access to a range of travel modes;
- improve safety and sense of place; and,
- develop an outreach process that promotes the involvement of all community stakeholders

Through the LCI program approximately $140 million in planning and transportation funds have been allocated to 102 distinct areas in the region. These funds have often been able to leverage public and private investments within LCI communities. In the 2008 LCI Implementation Survey, 63% of the communities who responded reported being able to establish special funding sources that leveraged money for the implementation of the LCI plan. The LCI program has proven to be very successful in creating momentum for major redevelopment efforts in transit station areas and small and large urban centers and corridors. This has spurred new housing and development closer to jobs and helped to promote more efficient transportation modes.

Since its inception in 1999, the program has encouraged the development of more livable communities in the Atlanta region by prompting cities, counties and communities to incorporate smart growth planning in their activity centers, town centers and corridors.

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

Chicago, Illinois • www.cmap.illinois.gov

The **Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning** (CMAP), responsible for integrating planning for land use and transportation for the seven counties in northeastern Illinois, is currently developing its *Go To 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan,* which promotes the integration of land use factors into its LRTP. The Plan is based on the *Regional Vision*, which describes the region's desired future in terms of quality of life, natural environment, social systems, economy and governance. It emphasizes the need to maximize existing physical infrastructure by encouraging reinvestment through mixed-use, compact development and infill redevelopment. It also highlights the need for safe communities, multi-modal transportation systems, diversified economic centers, energy efficiency, affordable housing, and civic involvement in the planning process. Sustainability, equity and innovation are three important aspects involved in achieving all of these priorities.

CMAP has also developed a number of other programs in order to promote livability within the Chicago region. The *Community Planning Grant Program*, funded by the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) makes funds available for developing Transit Oriented Development (TOD) plans in communities. The *Full Circle Community Planning and Mapping Initiative* works to provide all communities with high quality planning tools in order to allow increased exchange between planners and community members. The *CMAP Centers Toolkit* provides case studies and a four step process to assist communities in implementing their new goals. The *Regional Indicators Project* involves local communities and stakeholders to identify quality of life indicators which will be used to measure and track the progress the region makes toward its goals in their *Go To 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan*.

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission

Gary, Indiana • www.nirpc.org

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) is a regional council of local governments serving the citizens of Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties in Northwest Indiana, which has proposed a new program under its current Unified Planning Work Program. This program, *Transportation for Livable Communities*, seeks to support community-based transportation projects that bring liveliness to downtown areas by linking transportation investments with land use decisions in the region. It will fund capital and planning projects that focus on improving the current transportation system and integrating it with higher intensity and mixed-use development.

This program supports the regional planning organization's Vision and Strategic Directions from the strategies developed to "develop an effective multimodal transportation network" and "advance implementation of new regional public mass transportation." It also addresses planning factors from the federal SAFETEA-LU requirements by working to increase the safety, accessibility and mobility of the transportation system.

Michiana Area Council of Governments

South Bend, Indiana • www.macog.com

Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) is a regional intergovernmental agency established to foster cooperative, coordinated and comprehensive planning activities. The MACOG region represents Elkhart, Kosciusko, Marshall and St. Joseph Counties in Indiana and serves several functions as an MPO, an RPO, staff of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission, transit operator, and, performs economic development planning among other tasks.

MACOG produced a *Smart Growth Initiatives Handbook* for instructing small and mid-sized regions in effectively coordinating their transportation and land use planning to support the regions multi-faceted livability goals. This handbook provides strategies and illustrations for implementing the most effective tools to manage smart growth. These strategies address road and street management, transit management, bike/pedestrian planning, environmental conservation, farmland and open space preservation, and land use and GIS.

Additionally, MACOG has developed the *2035 Transportation Plan* focusing on improving public transit infrastructure, intermodal projects such as bicycle and pedestrian planning, highway projects, increasing transit safety and security, and implementing environmental mitigation techniques.

Green River Area Development District

Owensboro, Kentucky • www.gradd.org

Green River Area Development District, (GRADD), which serves seven counties in Western Kentucky, has demonstrated a commitment to livability in its *2008 Transportation Goals and Objectives and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* (CEDS). Its transportation goals focus on increasing access to all modes of transportation within the region, improving transportation safety, developing intermodal access of the transportation system, and providing access to tourism and agri-tourism related venues in the area. These goals emphasize a desire for increased inter-connectedness and accessibility within the transportation system. The CEDS draws its goals from four main roots:

- social and economic well-being;
- managed, balanced growth;
- livable communities; and,
- responsible resource conservation.

Livability is an important consideration in the economic development of the region, and this can be seen in the CEDS' goals, which are to:

- promote an economy that will allow the citizens of GRADD to achieve and maintain a quality standard of living;
- promote agriculture within the region as an integral part of its economy;
- make higher education more accessible and affordable;
- provide an adequate inventory of sites and buildings to attract and retain business and industry;
- improve the quality and qualifications of the workforce and expand employment opportunities;
- improve transportation access and capacity;
- ensure that all residents have clean, affordable water; and,
- promote efficient handling and disposal of solid waste.

These goals emphasize the need to solve the economic problems of the region, form a plan of action to implement its goals and strategies and develop performance measures to evaluate if goals are being met. The strategic projects of the CEDS reflect the priorities of both community and regional actors and highlight a common theme of dedication to job creation, economic prosperity, and improved quality of life.

Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Boston, Massachusetts • www.mapc.org

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) developed the *MetroFuture Regional Plan* for the residents of the 101 municipalities of Metro Boston. It incorporates a detailed smart growth plan, implementation strategies and a constituency of "plan builders" to help realize its goals. It aims to improve equity among residents, strengthen the economy, protect the environment, and improve overall quality of life; and, as a result, is unique in that it is comprehensive, regional and long range. The plan promotes smart growth and preservation by emphasizing job growth, improved schools and transportation in the metropolitan core while simultaneously defining areas with significant natural value as "Priority Conservation Areas." It also advocates for new transit improvements in regional hubs, focused growth in major suburban economic centers, mixed-use growth and the development of inter-connected transportation corridors.

The six goals of the plan are:

- sustainable growth patterns;
- better housing choices;
- vital, well-educated communities;
- increased regional prosperity;
- more transportation choices; and,
- a healthy environment.

A key part of the plan lies in its 13 implementation strategies which outline specific recommendations for action by government, businesses, institutions and individual households. Although each strategy seeks to achieve multiple goals, collectively, they serve as a roadmap for policy, advocacy, planning and development decisions.

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Springfield, Massaschsuetts • www.pvpc.org

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) is the designated regional planning body for the Pioneer Valley region, which encompasses more than 600,000 residents in 43 cities and towns in the Hampden and Hampshire county areas of western Massachusetts, bordering on Connecticut. PVPC is the primary agency responsible for increasing communication, cooperation, and coordination among all levels of government as well as the private business and civic sectors in order to benefit the Pioneer Valley region and to improve its residents' quality of life.

In 1997, the PVPC launched *Valley Vision*, their regional land use plan. Faced with significant growth related challenges and problems, including declining urban centers, dispersed suburban growth, poor air quality, environmental impacts, and loss of farmlands and forestland, the original plan was revisited and *Valley Vision 2* was published in 2007, and is a Smart Growth plan designed to promote compact, mixed use development in and around existing urban and town centers, while promoting protection of open space and natural resources outside developed centers. The plan consists of three parts:

- *The Plan* – which describes the costs of sprawl in the Pioneer Valley, smart growth solutions and smart growth success stories.
- *The Toolbox* – which includes smart growth strategies and model bylaws, design examples and photo simulations of smart growth principles.
- *The Map* – which illustrates locations for high and low density growth, protected open space greenbelts, Brownfields redevelopment sites and Chapter 40R smart growth districts.

Valley Vision 2 also includes the following outreach components, including a website and public outreach and local technical assistance, and a toolbox. Through public private partnerships and innovative techniques, *Valley Vision 2* has created an easy to use, accessible, and successful tool for its member communities.

Centralina Council of Governments

Charlotte, North Carolina • www.centralina.org

The Greater Charlotte Bi-State Region includes 15 counties around Charlotte, NC, and is home to 1.7 million people. **Centralina Council of Governments** (CCOG), in collaboration with Catawba Regional Council of Governments and the Charlotte Regional Partnership, has introduced *Connect: The Greater Charlotte Bi-State Regional Visioning Project*, a three-phase program to develop and implement a regional vision. In the first phase, Taking Stock, guided by a 37-member "Visioning Task Force", showcases the six core values developed from a review of 75 plans and reports adopted at the sub-regional and local level, as well as the studies and visions conducted by civic and non-governmental organizations in the region.

These core values include:

- increased collaboration among jurisdictions;
- sustainable, well-managed growth;
- a strong, diverse economy;
- a safe and healthy environment;
- high-quality educational opportunities; and,
- enhanced social equity.

These values will be used as part of the next phase of the project to articulate the vision and gain public support and investment. They reflect a desire for more emphasis on livability in regional planning and they indicate that this vision must emphasize the ecological, economic, historic, cultural and political reality of the bi-state region.

Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania • www.spc.org

Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) achieved a notable level of community participation through its award winning community outreach process to develop the *2035 Transportation and Development Plan* for the region. Known as *Project Region*, this process involved an innovative consensus-building approach which involved over 3,000 participants from the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, region in planning workshops, meetings and surveys. Through scenario planning, SPC incorporated new technology practices by presenting sketch scenarios of possible future conditions of the region in a live regional town meeting webcast. This allowed participants to call in rather than physically attend the meeting, while also being able to participate in online polls and view scenario simulations. Participants of the virtual town meeting voted on their preferences in six different categories including: development density; amount of land developed; households near transit; households near highway interchanges; regional travel; and, infrastructure cost.

Based on the participant response, the *Regional Vision Scenario* was developed as the heart of the Region's Plan. The *Regional Vision Scenario* focuses on: revitalizing and redeveloping existing communities; investing in infrastructure improvements at the corridor level; maintaining the existing transportation system; and, prioritizing business development to support a vibrant economy and diverse population.

The region's LRTP emphasizes a "maintenance first" approach to strengthening existing infrastructure and prioritizing operations projects. As an economic development district for the region, their CEDS includes common economic strategies from development plans formulated for the region, such as geographic investing, targeted industry sectors and increased economic development infrastructure. SPC tracks the performance measures associated with the implementation of their CEDS to evaluate the impact of investments and ensure the greatest return possible. SPC's planning process has produced a comprehensive transportation and development plan with an unprecedented amount of civic engagement and use of technology, making it a highly informed and valuable guide to regional transformation.

Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission

Columbus, Ohio • www.morpc.org

Rural, urban and suburban communities make up the central Ohio region. **Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission** (MORPC) is committed to building a better region in the 203 political boundaries within the region's seven counties – Delaware, Fairfield, Fayette, Franklin, Knox, Licking Madison, Marion, Morrow, Pickaway, Ross and Union. Dramatic changes will occur in the central Ohio region in the next 25 years. Over 500,000 new people are expected to move into the region, raising the total number of residents to approximately 2.5 million by 2030. These figures imply significant change for all communities of the region in coming years.

For nearly four years MORPC has engaged in intensive research that to help lead a collaborative effort to make the region as attractive, as livable, and as prosperous as possible. The centerpiece of this research is a multifaceted growth strategy called Regional Connections (available on MORPC's website). The objectives of Regional Connections were to create an understanding of Central Ohio's anticipated growth over the next 20 to 30 years, and to formulate a strategy to address this growth in a way that aesthetically and economically enhances the region.

Regional Connections identified, analyzed, extrapolated and, especially, considered in regional trends terms of impact on citizens of central Ohio, determining sixteen strategies for priority implementation:

- Create a Model Comprehensive Plan
- Program for Central Ohio Communities
- Conduct Regional Cost of Development
- Create Fiscal Impact/Cost of Community Service Tool
- Update Land Use Model
- Continue to Update Regional DataPort
- Continue to refine Conceptual Development Framework/Matrix
- Establish a Regional Leadership Institute
- Create a best practice set of procedures to guide the formation and implementation of multi-jurisdictional agreements
- Build on and leverage existing efforts of multi-jurisdictional cooperation
- Establish a Regional Development Sub-Committee
- Cooperate with the Regional Policy Roundtable
- Facilitate sub-regional working groups to address local issues
- Advocate to State and Federal representatives and partner agencies
- Advocate to local governments and quasi-governmental entities
- Conduct ongoing analysis of regional issues
- Provide un-biased guidance, support, resources and technical support to local governments to increase the chance of success

In October of 2007, MORPC adopted the recommendations of Regional Connections as "a significant guiding framework for Commission policy decisions." Since the challenges facing our region, and addressed in Regional Connections, do not recognize jurisdictional boundaries, MORPC is the logical catalyst for positive change and sound solutions — the best group positioned to bring together private, non-profit and public stakeholders and decision makers from across the region. To address these pivotal issues, MORPC has created the Center for Regional Development, which will provide leadership and contribute practical solutions to implement the land use and economic development recommendations of Regional Connections that will result in a more prosperous and sustainable Central Ohio while improving the overall quality of life.

Brazos Valley Council of Governments

College Station, Texas • www.bvcog.net

Brazos Valley Council of Governments (BVCOG) consists of seven counties, including Brazos, Burleson, Grimes, Leon, Madison, Robertson and Washington, and is charged with addressing regional issues and opportunities through multiple federal plans, including community policing plans, CEDs, transportation plans and workforce planning documents. Over a three-year visioning stage, Back in 1995, BCVOG developed the *Brazos 2020 Vision*, an initiative whereby long term goals and vision for the development of Brazos County and environs can be created through the mobilization of the talents and energies of the entire community and its citizens. The mission of *Brazos 2020* is "to design and facilitate a process which allows residents of Brazos County, either as individuals or as members of organizations or businesses, to participate in identifying, analyzing, and proposing desirable improvements to the community over the next twenty-five years."

More recently, in 2007, after consulting citizens and stakeholders, BVCOG created the Brazos Valley Building Healthy Communities Coalition to link smart growth and active aging principles in both rural and urban areas of the region. As part of this effort, the Wolf Pen Creek corridor was designated as a design district. The Wolf Pen Creek master plan was developed to ensure coordinated development that preserves the ecological integrity and creates new mixed-use developments including residential, office and recreational uses. This effort, as well as implementation of Evidence-Based Programs, Wolf Pen Creek's transportation system, and the growing number of programs and opportunities within the Brazos Valley region, allows residents to become more active.

Wasatch Front Regional Council

Salt Lake City, Utah • www.wfrc.org

Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC) comprises 60 cities and five counties, is the MPO, assists with the RPO, and manages the small cities Community Development Block Grant Program for the region. Over the coming years, the Wasatch Front is expected to annually add a population comparable to the city of Murray, or about 34,000 people. WFRC and Mountainland Association of Governments (MAG) created *Wasatch Choices 2040* to explore potential futures relative to growth patterns, transportation solutions and the environment.

The *Wasatch Choices 2040* process included community leaders and interested citizens in four counties to determine the long-term future of the region by developing growth principles and objectives for transportation planning. These principles created the foundation for actions for implementation locally and regionally to foster high quality of life and help the region compete with other regions. These principles were unanimously adopted in late 2005 by the mayors and county elected officials of both WFRC and MAG. Following the adoption, a scenario that illustrates how the region could grow if the principles are implemented was created, as well as implementation strategies or a "Toolbox of Ideas" that explain various strategies that public and private sector leaders could use to incorporate the growth principles to enhance quality of life indicators such as regional transportation facilities, air quality, land conservation, and quality neighborhoods.

Appendix II: Acronyms

Below is a list of acronyms that have been referenced throughout this report.

ARC Atlanta Regional Commission
BEDI Brownfields Economic Development Initiative
BVCOG Brazos Valley Council of Governments
CCOG Centralina Council of Governments
CDBG Community Development Block Grants
CED Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
CMAP Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
COG Council of Government
CRS Congressional Research Service
CWA Clean Water Act
DOE U.S. Department of Energy
DOL U.S. Department of Labor
DOT U.S. Department of Transportation
DRCOG Denver Regional Council of Governments
EDA U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration
EDD Economic Development District
EPA Environmental Protection Agency
FEMA Federal Emergency Management Agency
FTA Federal Transit Administration
GHG Greenhouse Gases
GRADD Green River Area Development District
HUD U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
IAA Interagency Agreement
ISTEA Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act
LCI Livable Centers Initiative
MACOG Michiana Area Council of Governments
MAG Mountainland Association of Governments
MAPC Metropolitan Area Planning Council
MORPC Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission
MPO Metropolitan Planning Organization
MWCOG Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
NARC National Association of Regional Councils
NIRPC Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission
PVPC Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
PWEDA Public Works and and Economic Development Act
RHED Rural Housing and Economic Development
RPO Regional Planning Organization
RTA Regional Transportation Authority
SAFETEA-LU Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act - a Legacy for Users
SANDAG San Diego Association of Governments
SBA Small Business Administration
SPC Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
TOD Transit Oriented Development
USDA U.S. Department of Agriculture
WFRC Wasatch Front Regional Council
WQM Water Quality Management Planning

About The National Association of Regional Councils

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), representing local elected officials and their regional planning organizations, serves as a national voice for regionalism by advocating for regional cooperation as the most effective way to address a variety of community planning, economic development opportunities, and infrastructure issues. NARC's member organizations are composed of multiple local governments that work together to serve American communities - large and small, urban and rural. In 2008, NARC launched the first of four public awareness campaigns – Green Regions, Mobile Regions, Build Regions and Secure Regions. For additional information, please visit www.NARC.org.

The National Association of Regional Councils
1666 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20009
202.986.1032 phone
202.986.1038 fax
www.NARC.org