

# **The New Collaborative Region: Suburbs and Cities Working on the Future**

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## **Panel Presentation:**

### **Transportation, Land Use and Regional Collaboration:**

#### **National Experiences**

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I wanted to really hone in on this distinction that the prior two Roberts made on the distinction between government and governance. And I want you to think about the consequences of that in the 21st century in a time that's increasingly not a nonhierarchical decision-making model in our country generally in terms of public attitudes toward government and in terms of government attitudes toward large institutions generally, whether they be attitudes toward, quote, "big business" or "big government."

I want you to think about how some of the informal networks and civic networks that Robert and Robert just described might apply in your lives, and that distinction between statutory authority -- which is something the agency I am going to describe to you from my hometown has a lot of -- and the distinction between authority which is in statute and influence, on the other hand, which is something much more informal and is developed through networks of trust.

So those are the things I want to hone in on here in the context of the lifecycles of a regional vision, the lifecycles of how you renew and refresh collaboration as generational change occurs, generational change in the leadership structure, and also as population growth occurs and new entrants come into the arena of public life.

So I want to start with the history of planning in the Portland region. And just as the RPA in New York is the result of progressive impulses at one point in history and a snapshot in their case in the 1920s, so, too, is our Metro Council the fragment of a progressive impulse from the 1970s and, as a result, has characteristics of that era, some of which are very strong, some of which have real limitations.

And, again, I want you to be thinking about this in contrast with Utah and check some of your expectations about what a place is like politically at the door and relate it to that difference between authority and influence.

Robert Grow just described perhaps one of the most conservative states in the union, a state that gave George W. Bush perhaps his greatest margin out of all 50 states, as far as I know. The state of Utah, that is passing measures to build light rail lines and is embracing affordable housing, other things that would be conventionally referred to as the domain of what he called Eastern elite blue states.

Yet, at the same time, my state -- and here again, I want you to think about what your expectations might be -- a state that gave John Kerry a very healthy margin, 55-to-45, a state that has typically been seen as very progressive; our state passed a measure to restrict government planning. And the last time that we had light rail on the ballot, it actually failed by a narrow margin. So I want you to think about why those expectations are a little upside down and relate that to the different approaches that we have taken.

So the fact was in the 1970s, Oregon and the Portland region were, quote, ahead, unquote, of other regions in the country in terms of doing regional planning, but did it in a strong sense of government structures. The confluence effect as it really came together for us in the 1970s -- which don't recur in history but are a product of that time -- could provide some lessons for you. One is that sense of crisis that causes people to act. Otherwise, there's a natural human inclination to continue with the status quo. In the 1970s, for us, it was population growth; that steps needed to be taken, something needed to be done differently because the population was growing.

As Robert Grow just described, the sense of crisis does impel people to act. It doesn't necessarily create lasting alliances at the civic level. It also helps people to focus on what they don't want -- in our case, it was what they don't want: sprawl -- but it's not as good as focusing people on the things that they do want in the sense of building community.

Other factors that came together in the 1970s to help create the state legislation that made my agency possible included the sense of threat to farmland that was near the urban area. And that created a very unusual alliance in our legislature that hasn't recurred since between rural Republicans, who at that time were defending the agricultural interests, and urban Democrats, who wanted to have the city revitalization and the revitalization, in particular, of downtown Portland. Very odd alliance.

We also had at that time the growth of that city neighborhood movement, which, in turn, created a pot of money in transportation because of the cancellation of a proposed freeway which would have gone through southeast Portland and was cancelled, creating in 1974 dollars \$500 million. The reason that local officials, particularly from the suburban areas, wanted to participate in regionalization was because they got the chance to share in that money. So, again, a lesson there.

Money does bring people together. Not necessarily, though, in a collaborative fashion, but it does bring them to the table.

Three other factors that make regionalism more easily achieved in our region than certainly in yours or in many others: One is our state and our region are relatively small and at that time, in the 1970s particularly, very homogenous. The gap between central city and suburb in our region is very small demographically speaking, ethnically speaking, racially speaking. And this is not a value statement.

It's just sort of a statement of fact in terms of the ability to have that communication. And we are also a state with a culture of experimentation. Most of us, most Oregonians, were born someplace else.

And so we don't have the sense of allegiances to the old way of doing things and also a culture of experimentation, whether it was the bottle bill or assisted suicide or decriminalization of marijuana.

Oregon has been first in a lot of these sorts of things in part because of the size and the culture of experimentation.

And then a final factor was leadership, both at the city level and at the state level in the 1970s that really raised the issue of land use planning to a high level.

So the result of that today, we are a region of 1.3 million people. Twenty-five cities are within the jurisdiction of the Metro Council. My six colleagues are elected from geographic districts which are intentionally drawn not to coincide with city boundaries, but are reflective of population areas.

They all represent the people in their districts. They don't represent the city governments in their district. I am elected region-wide for a four-year term.

We have a tremendous amount of authority relative to a council of governments. And, again, I want to draw that distinction between the type of statutory authority that we have and the moral influence that a group like Envision Utah has. And I want you to weigh the limitations and strengths of either of those approaches.

We are a special purpose district. We are not a general purpose government. We don't have police or fire service. We have very specific things in statute that we do. The most notable in the land use arena is we do have authority over the comprehensive plans of those 25 cities. And we also draw where the urban growth boundary is that separates our region from the surrounding rural areas.

The challenge for us and for any region, whether it's a fragmented region like the one here or one with more unitary-type structures such as Albuquerque or Indianapolis or Louisville -- the challenge really is that people, everyday people, live their lives regionally. They live in one place, they work in another city, they shop in a third city, and they drop their kids off at soccer in yet another parks district. But our government structures by and large do not reflect that reality. Our government structures in this country are by and large the product of lines that were drawn in the 19th century.

So what are some of the obstacles to bridging those gaps? And there are two different approaches. Ours -- being a result of the 1970s and kind of a good government-type movement -- is a more hierarchical institutional type of approach. Utah is taking a different approach based on their demographics and their politics of the 1990s.

But there are four major obstacles as I look at the challenges, both in our region and generally. One is the parochialism of the political system. And it's a natural occurrence. By and large, most of us in political life are elected to represent particular voters in particular jurisdictions and get money and bring it back to our districts, and there's very little to be gained politically by cooperating regionally in terms of our own careers.

There's also just a resistance to change in the public sector. The corporate world has changed so rapidly. The governments in other parts of the world -- in the Soviet

Union -- don't exist. And Europe is one economic unit, yet there's a real resistance to change there.

But then the two final obstacles that I think are most a lesson for me in terms of some of the changes that we're making in our region: One is for these networks to be robust; it can't just be about government. And I think that has been, frankly, one of our real limitations -- our statutory, our government structure, has been too much about government and not enough about the other networks that really make a region work. Particularly business networks such as the freight industry. But you could name a whole lot of others.

And to have truly robust regionalism, it can no longer just be about government as it has been in our region for a long time. And then finally, the final challenge -- and this means involving the public -- is how do you connect local issues in a non-threatening, collaborative way to a regional vision? And that, to me, is the biggest obstacle, the biggest challenge that we face in our region every day.

If you think about what would bring somebody out -- what would bring you out to a meeting? If you had limited time in your evening, would you like to come out and talk about row houses that are being built down the street, or a park that may be sited in your neighborhood? Or would you go to a meeting to talk about the urban growth boundary which may be far away and something that may happen 20 years from now? Everybody is more interested in things close to home. But those have clear regional implications. And so make that connection. Very, very important.

So the remedies for you to consider are these exercises that do connect local conditions to regional factors and bring it home in tangible ways, such that the decisions about that row house that are being made in your neighborhood or the decisions about whether or not a road is going to be connected to someplace else do connect in the public mind to some larger regional vision, and have the understanding that all those local cumulative decisions -- not just local government decisions, but business decisions -- are part of some larger vision that there's been some mutual subscription to at some level at some point in time.

A second factor for us that bolsters regionalism is some practical and tangible results; things that everyday people can relate to. For us, it's some pretty basic things. We run the zoo, a very popular tourist attraction, something that used to be the ward of the City of Portland. Now an academic would describe the regionalization of the Portland Zoo as an exercise in fiscal equity and that it was a municipal facility that was actually being enjoyed by people in the suburban areas who were not paying taxes for it. We don't talk in terms of fiscal equity. We talk in terms of, "This belongs to everybody and we have pride in it." And it's also something that people now associate with our agency.

Planning, frankly, is not what you lead with in terms of being a popular tangible activity. Warm and fuzzy things like animals are certainly more tangible to most people.

Running a convention center is something that we also do. We also manage the solid waste system and so took a vexing problem away from local jurisdictions, something they didn't want to have to deal with in terms of siting a landfill and managing all this garbage. This is something that the Metro Council did. So, again, it's adding value. It's not necessarily imposing ourselves.

The third remedy that I think is very important is that regionalism needs to be asserted on the basis of mutual interdependence. Ontario and San Pedro are part of one system in the commercial world -- the international freight system -- and so it behooves the leadership of Ontario and San Pedro to get together to work on that network. Because if San Pedro fails, Ontario fails. If Ontario fails, San Pedro fails. There's a mutual interdependence there that exists in the commercial world that needs to be asserted so that the players come together. That relates to this sense of self-interest and linking self-interest. Very important factor, self-interest properly understood.

And so defining every locality's self-interest as being linked to a regional self-interest is very, very important.

The final factor that we're learning is that public involvement needs to be modulated over time. It waxes and wanes. You can't maintain interest in regional affairs at a high pitch all along.

And so that's where I want to close, with describing some of the things that we're doing, that we've done in the past, and some of the next steps that we are taking.

What are the results of regionalism in our region? I mentioned that we have rationalized some services, services like solid waste or the zoo or management of facilities like the convention center or the performing arts center. We have not gone very far in some other services such as water supply.

Unlike everybody else who's in this room, I think, and certainly unlike Utah, we are a region with lots of water. Yet the way we are investing and the way we move it around is very fragmented. We have 38 water districts, and in rational terms it would make a lot of sense to regionalize that. We have not, and when I ask myself, "Why have we not when it makes so much sense?" it's because of the way we often have approached things -- in this hierarchical turf-conscious statutory sense -- instead of that collaborative network sense of mutual self-interest.

So on that first measure of whether we have rationalized and regionalized services, it's a mixed bag. We have done some of them, not others.

Second, on the regional transportation network -- not just public transit, but also the streets and roads -- we have done fairly well. We do have a high degree of collaboration. That has helped us, in fact, with our federal agenda and to some extent the state.

We've also been successful in a third area which has been the preservation of natural areas through public purchase. We have purchased over 8,000 acres in the last 10 years. Eight thousand acres for our region is a fair amount. There's about 230,000 acres in our urban area, so 8,000 acres is significant for us. A \$135 million program, in 1995 dollars.

And, again, it is an example of something that could not be done by individual cities. Those 25 cities would not have been able to achieve the amassing that we have been able to do regionally. And, again, that's something we can show to our voters that's very tangible and has lasting impacts.

And then finally there has been the 2040 concept, which was developed in the early 1990s because our population was growing very fast and if it continued to be arrayed across the landscape in the way it was being arrayed at that time it would impose on those areas around us that people didn't want to see infringed upon.

And in the early 1990s, this plan was developed and has since been implemented at the local level to direct more growth into the centers of our communities. It is a highly regulatory document, and this now, I would confess, is one of the limitations of it. It's because it was largely the product of impulses of what we don't want -- meaning sprawl -- that there wasn't enough about embracing what we do want. And there was not enough connection with the investment markets and the private sector about what it takes to actually make a place develop in terms of the center.

So while the principles of 2040 are now incorporated in the comprehensive plans of all 25 cities, it's not necessarily occurring on the ground in the way that it should. So we are now on the verge of launching a new look at how we grow. Our population forecasts are actually accelerating. We are looking at 1.1 million more people over the next 25 years, and using that as a rallying cry to get people interested. But not in the sense of fear this time, but in the sense of how do we make this something that's good for our communities, and how do we use tools in addition to zoning for it, and how do we use investment tools to make sure that we are providing incentive for the right types of growth?

So we are now on the verge of refreshing something. We are, in our lifecycle, having the product of something from the 1970s and recognizing we need to update it for the 21st century.

And that's the lesson that I want to close with, is that this work continually goes on. And as you accomplish things, it leads to something else. And you just have to stay at it for the long term.