

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

Robert Yaro, *President, Regional Plan Association, New York City*

The fundamental notion is that a regional framework for the growth of a region as complex as this one is essential. In a few places, it's regional government. Portland is one of them. But in most places and in New York, in particular, where we have three states coming together -- kind of like plate tectonics, bumping up against each other -- they really don't like each other. The regional framework that a civic organization like Regional Plan provides is, I think, vital.

My focus, of course, will be on the role of a civic-led planning organization. David will have a different perspective. Robert, I think, will probably second a few motions that I make. And so the focus of my presentation is on regional governance and not on regional government.

I will talk a little bit about Regional Plan Association, a little bit of context so I can get right into it, and then just a brief vignette on some recent activities and transportation planning and urban development that happened in other places, and then I will get into the Lower Manhattan case study.

This is home. This is the way we look at the region from the New Jersey Highlands back into Manhattan. And what RPA has been pounding away at in our region now for 85 years is the notion that we are all in this together, that each of the three states, that the suburbs and New York City and the other urban centers in the region have a shared future. We are all in it together, and the boat either sinks or floats, depending on how we are all doing together.

RPA is a 31-county region. I figure I have been at it now in New York for about 17 years, and I am just beginning to figure out how the place works. And one of the things that, of course, is so exciting about working in a place like Southern California or New York is that these are incredibly complex places, lots of moving parts, and the parts don't always mesh. Our job is to make sure that they do mesh to the extent that they can.

I describe the Regional Plan Association as a product of the progressive era. Time came and went and now has come again. We were founded in 1922 as an ad hoc group to do a long-range regional plan for the New York metropolitan region. It was the first of its kind in the world. And we have done two since then. The Second Regional Plan was in 1968.

Then I wrote a Third Regional Plan after about a six-year planning process. Cast of thousands, Cecil B. DeMille planning. A consistent theme in all these presentations is this notion that you need to get everybody who has a point of view involved. That's hard to do when you have 22 million people living in a region, but we discovered there were probably several thousand key stakeholders -- business, civic, government, religious, community, environmental and so forth -- leaders who needed to be a part of a planning process.

And that's what we did over a several-year period, resulting in our 1996 Third Regional Plan called *The Region at Risk*. The thought at the time, and still is, is that the New York region needed to reinvent itself. Every place does, in fact. This is not something that just New York or Portland or Southern California needs to do. We all need to continuously look over our shoulders at the competition and look at what we need to do better.

And that's really what Regional Plan is about. We were incorporated in 1929 as a permanent not-for-profit organization. It's kind of an interesting story, that a group that incorporates three months before the stock market crash proposing what today would be in the neighborhood of a half trillion dollars worth of infrastructure investments. But in my review of processes like this around the world, that's the best time to do it -- at a time of impending crisis -- because that's when you get people's attention.

We had a few other things working for us. In 1933, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt became president, we had a few advantages. One is that we were the only place in the country that had essentially preliminary design on a half trillion dollars worth -- or in today's dollars -- probably 50- or 60 billion dollars worth -- of infrastructure: investments, parks, bridges, tunnels, parkways, highways, rail lines, and so forth.

And when the Roosevelt administration was looking to get people back to work, it was looking to put these projects to work -- or get them going quickly. We were ready to go. We had a few very strong assets in the form of Robert Moses, the great master builder, and his counterpart, Austin Tobin, at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. They largely built the plan.

Our chairman conveniently was Dr. Thomas Frederick Delano, who happened to be the president's uncle. Always good to have a friend in the White House. In his spare time, he also chaired the National Resources Planning Board, which was the group that was coordinating national media planning.

So we laid out the first of what I like to describe as the first real 20th Century infrastructure system for a large metropolitan area. Integrated transit, highway, green space, watershed protection, environmental protection, you name it. Systems urban design proposals for things like Rockefeller Center and other things that happened very quickly in the 1930s and 1940s.

It is always nice to do a regional plan and have it turn into bricks and mortar and action. And that's really what happened in New York. We proposed that there be three airports. We have three airports. Then we built a system of bridges and tunnels and highways, and virtually all of it was in place by 1960. And in 1960, when the interstate highway system got going, New York had two-thirds of the limited access highway miles in the United States because of the work that had been done over a 30-year period in implementing our First Regional Plan.

We did the second plan in the 1960s, which looked at the emerging challenges of sprawl and suburban growth and how to organize that. We came up with what I think at the time was a revolutionary proposal to reconfigure the New York Metropolitan Region around a network of regional centers. We identified a dozen key regional urban and suburban centers across the region. We reaffirmed the role of these places in the 1996 plan. And we proposed a network of improved rail links and other infrastructure that would tie these together into an integrated synergistic network.

We've got about a million jobs now in the suburban centers that we identified in the Second Regional Plan. We are continuing to work on master planning and implementation plans for places like the Nassau Hub on Long Island, and White Plains and Stanford and others.

It is a continuing success story. Again, a synergy between centers and transit and the green systems of the region is something that RPA has always promoted with some success.

For our third plan, we laid out five campaigns. We have four regional commissions in place since 1996 that are managing big natural systems that protect our public water supplies and so forth. And a mobility campaign that laid out a \$50 billion investment strategy. Forty billion dollars of it is now funded, and integrates our regional rail and subway systems into what we think of as a 21st century transit system. We have a centers campaign, again reaffirming the central role of the central business district, and expanding it from Manhattan to the New Jersey waterfront and the inner-ring suburbs. And a governance campaign -- not government campaign, but a campaign that is now very actively promoting tax reform systems, education, finance reform and reform of our public authorities.

And the last one is a new campaign for us, and it's something that Robert has been working with us on. It's a mega-regions campaign. It's a look at the northeast, the larger systems of urban centers in the northeast that we are a part of, and across the country that you are a part of that we think are going to be driving the nation's economy over the next half century or so.

A couple of vignettes here. Mobility. This has been a real focus of ours since the very beginning; getting highways and transit systems that work. We proposed a set of rail improvements that added about 2 percent to the length of our 1,400-mile rail system but which added about 25 percent to the capacity of the transit system, and provides for through services and links to airports and to suburban centers.

With the successful statewide Bond Act Campaign, a \$50 billion Bond Act Campaign - \$25 million for transit, \$25 million for highway improvements -- we've got most of the funding in place now for these big transit links that bring new rail services in

from New Jersey to Manhattan, across the entire region, from Long Island into the port, out to the airports, and then a four-borough transit system that links the Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens with greater mobility.

I am reading the propaganda here. What is the fastest growing political subdivision in the United States in terms of the numbers of new residents over the past 15 years? Anybody want to guess what it is?

Do I hear Atlanta? Maybe. Could be. Phoenix is sometimes on the list. Las Vegas is on the list. And I saw the Inland Empire region on the list. Well, the answer is New York City. It has added about a million and a half additional residents over a 15-year period. We expect another million and a half. We are building the infrastructure and the capacity for growth to accommodate that in New York City and across the region.

A second campaign is the centers campaign. We are actively promoting the expansion of the central business district. We've got about two and a half million jobs in our CBD, 400 million square feet of commercial office space. And the proposal is to make it possible for New York City to continue to have about a third of the region's employment base. And we are creating essentially a third area of our business district in the west side of Manhattan. That's the far west side of Manhattan. The plan identified it as the place where we were going to do the commercial and residential development and so forth.

We had a little difference of opinion with Mayor Bloomberg last year when he decided this would be a terrific place to put a new football stadium. We organized a modest campaign that proposed some alternatives to a football stadium. The stadium was killed by the state legislature. I patched things up with the mayor. We're talking again, and we are moving.

The plans for mixed-use development on the west side are moving ahead. The rezoning has happened. The rail line is being extended to the far west side. And, I think, again, a very important role for a civic organization is to keep its eye on the ball.

We identified this as a priority initially about 30 years ago, master-planned it in 1996, and have just moved quietly forward with the idea.

Again, just a brief digression. Something I am working on at the University of Pennsylvania, and working with Mark Pisano here in Southern California and with other folks around the country, is on strategies for these emerging mega-regions.

Robert has used the term "megopolis" to describe the urban core of these places, but these are extended networks of metropolitan regions. The northeast is the first. But Southern California, the Bay Area, and Cascadia in the Pacific Northwest are others.

In the northeast, we are now working on strategies to promote mobility and quality of life and goods movement and so forth. And these are places -- New York and Boston and Philadelphia and Baltimore -- that don't have diplomatic relations with each other. I'm trying real hard. We are organizing a forum for business and civic leaders from these places. This is where I'd like to really be spending my time, but occasionally these other things come up that you have to pay attention to.

You know, 9-11 happened. We dropped everything for about two years. We just dropped everything for at least a year to organize the civic alliance to rebuild downtown New York. And we pulled in 85 of our friends in the business, civic, philanthropic and academic communities from across the New York metropolitan area. And the Port Authority had been literally blown out of their headquarters.

Mayor Guillian was leaving office. Mayor Bloomberg was coming in. There was a real question of where the leadership was going to come from in the rebuilding process. And we pulled together a series of alliances of civics. And it was tough stuff, because getting strong-minded civic leaders to pull in the same direction is a difficult business. It's easy to find a common denominator, the lowest common denominator. Finding the common ground down here is really easy. Finding the common ground up here is really hard. And I think we did a pretty good job of doing that.

The vision that we laid out is that we were going to try to transform -- you always, after a disaster of this kind, try to find some meaning in this. And so the meaning, we thought, was in trying to rebuild Lower Manhattan as a model of what a 21st century city ought to be, and in many ways taking what was the archetypal 20th century urban center and transforming it into an archetypal 21st century city.

We are on our way to doing it. One of the lessons in all of this and one of the lessons I want to leave with you is that this stuff doesn't happen in an afternoon or a week or a year or two. We have been at it for 85 years in our region and we are just getting started. And these big investment projects take a decade or longer. I don't know if you noticed the number of years attached to each one of those big transit projects. Every one of them has taken a decade and in some cases a generation to go from vision, to financing, to construction, to operation.

And Lower Manhattan is going to be rebuilt over a 20-year period. Now, we had this little problem. We set out to create a 21st century city and a certain elected official set out to get himself re-elected and there was a slightly different set of agendas there, but we have managed to find the common ground for political leadership.

This had to be a public process. This was not going to be the good old boys in -- well, we don't have smoke-filled rooms anymore. We have banned that, but -- in tightly sealed rooms making decisions. The notion that the public was going to be driving this process, that this was going to be driven by urban design and design and architectural excellence, that there be a respectful memorial at the heart of the rebuilt Trade Center site, that we build sustainability and green architecture into things and so forth.

I think probably our biggest success was at the very beginning, saying that the rebuilding plans had to be driven by improved access and mobility on the one hand and improved quality of life and amenity on the other. And I think we have had some success. Now, \$5 billion of new transit projects -- on top of the rebuilt systems that were destroyed -- are now all under construction, which is pretty fast track after only four years.

We also said it can't just be 16 acres, the Trade Center site. It had to be the entire district of Lower Manhattan, including the low income and immigrant communities in Chinatown and other places that surround it.

One of the things I've learned in looking at the history of places that rebuild, hot marketplaces, strong marketplaces always rebuild what they had before.

That's just the way it is. Look at London after the fire, San Francisco after the earthquake, Chicago after the fire. That's what happens. The weak marketplaces are the places that can transform themselves. And we have been blessed in a way by having a weak commercial market.

So we will end up with a redesign of the plan I think later this year, early next year with the new governor, and then we will actually be able to achieve the vision that was first put forward.

Again, opening up the process, we decided that we needed to have more than just the usual suspects. This is an official public hearing. The officials at the front row -- you know the situation.

Looks a little like this room right here, some guy standing at the front droning on, public gets to speak. "Two minutes and state your business and sit down." Terrifying, you know, for members of the public.

So we said, "We really need to bring in a few more of our friends," and we reached out across the region and pulled in 5,000 folks who represented a cross-section in terms of geography, race, income, gender, diversity, you name it, and we actually went through the process of saying no to wealthy people from Scarsdale and then we worked very hard to pull in immigrants from Chinatown and Jackson Heights and places like that who had never been in a public meeting of this kind in their lives.

We also brought in the whole board of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. We had the mayor in the room. We had the governor in the room. We had every important elected official in the tri-state area. The governor of New Jersey was there. It was an extraordinary event.

This was an electronic town meeting essentially with tables of 10 people. Very diverse. Some people described it as being like jury duty. People you would never see in your daily lives. So a stockbroker sitting next to the housewife from Queens, sitting next to the widow of the firefighter who died, and sitting next to the small entrepreneur, and so forth.

Every table had a trained facilitator with a wireless laptop linked to a theme team in the back of the room. Everybody had a keypad so they could key questions. And as discussions developed at the tables, the facilitator sent the big ideas back to the theme team. They started to appear on screens, and they started voting on the big ideas.

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the Port Authority presented these four magnificent plans for the redevelopment. And somebody at one table said, "Looks like Albany." If you know Albany, New York, it is pretty miserable. And at the end of the day, the master plans were rejected. And the mayor and the governor both announced the next day that they were starting over again. It was the only time I've ever done any work that was covered in "The Saigon Times" and all of the major newspapers around the world.

So this really made a difference; it captured people's imagination. LMDC took a number of the principles -- not all of them. And we went from an inside game of working with these guys to an outside game as they sort of went off, essentially disagreeing with some of the recommendations of the public.

For example, there was a raid on the memorial. So we did a series of simulations -- this is my favorite one -- where one of the leaseholders was a major shopping center developer and they proposed to build a standard issue suburban shopping mall right next to the memorial. So we said, "Well, let's simulate what that might look like." And this appeared on the front page of "The New York Post."

And then this business -- finally -- this is interesting -- this was the master plan that emerged. I think we are going to end up with a lot of high-rise, a lot of density. This is Lower Manhattan.

I think the Freedom Tower in the upper left-hand corner is not ever going to be built. And this is a little difference of opinion with the governor or with the -- and probably the next governor of New York is going to have to make that decision. The mayor is helping us do that.

But a lot of the rest of this will happen. There will be much more mix of activities; residential, retail, commercial, and the arts and so forth.

So the building skylines have been adopted. We will end up with something that looks like this; a memorial that I think really is going to be a credit to everyone. There was a separate jury, separate design process, 50,000 proposals from around the world. And this is Michael Aaron's proposal, which I think is going to be a real tribute.

Outstanding issues: You just have to stay at it. We are four and a half years into this. We are going to be at it for the next ten years, I suspect.

So we've got some things to do. The development program is in the process of being changed. Design guidelines are about to be adopted. We are hammering away at the cultural program. Some of it's dropped out. Some of it needs to come back in. There is a continuing struggle about reinstalling the streets that were taken out when the Trade Center was built, and we had a tussle with the Port Authority just last week and we said, "Forget about it. It ain't going to happen," and built an environmental impact review process, a regulatory process around the street. That will happen.

Big success around the transit. New transit hubs, new rail links to the suburbs that are now under construction. And that will transform Lower Manhattan, I think, over time into a much more interesting and diverse place; 20,000 new housing units downtown and conversions of office space into residential. So it's a much more interesting 24-hour place than it's ever been.

On the left-hand side, this is the newly-designed train station that's now under construction, and it's integrated with another head house for the 14 subway lines that just were totally illegible to New Yorkers, much less to visitors. All of this is now under construction.

Then finally, this business of linking it to the rest of region, making sure that what happens at the Trade Center site is linked to other investment strategies and transit strategies, mobility strategies for the rest of the city and the rest of the region.

Most of these recommendations have now been accepted and are being implemented. Most of the big transit investments -- or all of them are under construction at this point.

Some failures: Again, this inability to affect the program. This is the limitation of the civics. You know, Jimmy Carter said, "We have a government as good as its people," and the people keep electing folks who may not be quite up to what's needed. So we keep hammering away. Mayors come and go. Governors come and go. And civics are there.

But it's very hard to do when you have elected officials that don't always get it. The master plan has been eroded. The lack of design guidelines hurts, and we are continuing to press for design guidelines. And there are a whole series of other things. There are no virgin births.

Those happen every couple of thousand years or so. So there are rewards on this process as well as any other. Don't let anyone tell you that you can achieve perfection in any civic-led planning function. But the outcomes are a lot better than they would have been. We are going to stay at it. And I think Lower Manhattan is on its way to becoming a 21st century center. It's going to become the place that I think Americans hoped that it would be at the end of this rebuilding process. We are putting \$20 million of your tax dollars to work in rebuilding this place. And I think when it's all done in a decade or so, we will have a lot to be proud of.

And then finally this whole process set a new standard for civic engagement, for public engagement in planning in New York. And I've heard people say that it, in fact, raised the bar for the rest of the country as well. The expectation now is that the public is going to have a meaningful say in a process like this one.

I will stop there. Thank you very much.