



G | M | F The German Marshall Fund
of the United States
STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION

Urban and Regional Policy

2017 | No.28

METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE: TRANSATLANTIC LESSONS FOR THE NASHVILLE REGION

MICHAEL SKIPPER



METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE: TRANSATLANTIC LESSONS FOR THE NASHVILLE REGION

2017 | No.28

MICHAEL SKIPPER

SUMMARY:

This paper explores the opportunities to improve collaborative regional governance in the greater Nashville area, drawing on lessons learned from models in Manchester, England; Antwerp, Belgium; and Turin, Italy. The greater Nashville metropolitan area finds itself at an interesting point in time, with growth in population expected to increase by 1.4 million residents by 2040. The challenge Nashville currently grapples with is how to manage the current changes while planning for the future in the areas of service provision, transportation, infrastructure planning, economic development, and housing. How can past collaborative efforts that have brought community leadership together to develop regional plans be strengthened and improved upon to address current and future challenges? The objective of this paper is therefore to look to European models to help identify an array of strategies that could offer the Nashville metropolitan area a blueprint for expanding on, enhancing, and maximizing its current regional efforts, especially as communities look for more efficiency out of government in a time of limited financial resources.

About the Urban and Regional Policy Fellowship

The Urban and Regional Policy (URP) fellowships provide opportunities for practitioners and policymakers working on economic and social issues at the urban and regional policy levels to meet with their counterparts across the Atlantic and discuss policies and measures that have been implemented. URP fellows are generally civic leaders who are engaged in targeted policy areas with an interest in gaining an understanding of how these issues are approached in a culture other than their own and an ability to apply lessons learned to their own community. Past grantees have included representatives from state, local, and regional governments and leaders from the media, non-profit, and philanthropic communities. The URP fellowship is not intended to support academic research.

Michael Skipper currently serves as the executive director of the Greater Nashville Regional Council and the lead facilitator to the Middle Tennessee Mayors Caucus. He has more than 20 years of experience in public policy, community and regional planning, and social research and has held senior positions with public agencies and private consulting firms in Austin, Seattle, Boise, and Central Florida. Michael received his undergraduate degree in geography from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, and a master's of science in community and regional planning from the University of Texas at Austin.

A Booming Metro Area

The Nashville area, like so many other metro regions in the U.S., is experiencing tremendous population growth as people and businesses look to take advantage of the inherent efficiencies and cultural diversity of urban centers. Between 2010 and 2016, the Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, Tennessee metropolitan statistical area (MSA) grew by nearly 200,000 people to a total population of about 1.87 million,¹ or by 90 people per day over that timeframe. Last year, the region added approximately 100 people per day.

With that growth has come enormous challenges for Middle Tennesseans: the transportation system is overwhelmed with few public transit choices on the horizon; home ownership is becoming unaffordable with limited options for renting; technology and innovation are running up against traditional regulatory systems that are not quick to adapt; the economy is growing again but leaving too many people behind; and just about every solution to those problems costs money that very few have the courage to raise.

One thing that these issues have in common is that they require interdisciplinary collaboration and cooperation among local communities at the metropolitan scale in order to be adequately addressed — be it through regional planning and policies, or the collective development of technical or financial support for action to be taken at the local level. The problem is the current patchwork quilt of organizations is not equipped, in its current form or charter at least, to lead the region head first into the new global economy that is actively being built metro area by metro area.

Opportunities to Improve Regional Collaboration

This paper explores opportunities to improve regional collaboration in the greater Nashville area, combining lessons learned from European peers gleaned from a fellowship sponsored by the Urban and Regional Policy Program of The German Marshall Fund (GMF) of the United States, with an ongoing local initiative to evaluate the potential for integrating the Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

(MPO) into the Greater Nashville Regional Council (GNRC). These two separate organizations each play a formal role in convening community leadership to develop regional plans that influence growth policies and investments in infrastructure.

Federal legislation passed in the 1960s created MPOs to serve as regional partnerships among federal agencies, state government, and local elected leadership in the United States' urbanized areas. While MPOs lead in the development of metropolitan transportation plans and improvement programs,² their effectiveness for broader collaborative problem solving is often constrained due to limited funding or a narrow interpretation of enabling legislation and authority. A brilliant idea in concept, communities can get more out MPOs if they explored creative ways to empower the agencies to work across a wider spectrum of issues within their regions. In the Nashville area, the MPO is housed within the local planning department of the Metropolitan Government of Nashville-Davidson County, but serves a seven-county region.

The Tennessee legislature established the GNRC in 1965 as one of nine development districts across the state.³ State legislatures in the 1960s created development districts, or regional councils of governments (COGs), to provide a mechanism for regional cooperation and technical support for planning and economic development initiatives. The federal government incentivized states to create regional COGs in order to access federal grants for economic development, infrastructure, and social services for lower income or older Americans.⁴ Councils of governments that serve as their region's MPO tend to be more effective than those that do not, largely due to their ability to pull local leaders together to coordinate investments in transportation infrastructure. The GNRC serves 13 counties across the greater Nashville area, and is a free-standing agency owned and governed by its local government members.

The GMF fellowship, conducted in 2016, provided an opportunity to find best practices and lessons learned from Northern England, Antwerp, Belgium,

1 U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 Population Estimates

2 As defined in Title 23, Part 450 of the Code of Federal Regulations

3 Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 64, Chapter 7

4 Per the Older Americans Act of 1965

and Turin, Italy. The research design aimed to identify an array of strategies that could offer the Nashville metropolitan area a blueprint for getting more out of its regional efforts, especially as communities look for more efficiency out of government in a time of limited financial resources. Specifically, the research sought to answer the following questions related to improving the effectiveness of regional collaboration:

- How can the level of effort be simplified or reduced for local officials who participate in the process?
- How can adopted policies and plans be better aligned with political motives and funding programs?
- How can planning for a diverse array of metropolitan area issues be better integrated to leverage assets and resources across platforms and agencies?
- How can efforts to improve collaboration be carried out in a way that ensures inclusiveness and equity in all policies and actions?
- How can efforts to improve coordination be implemented with increased public transparency and accountability over the status quo?
- How can creative problem solving and the implementation of innovative solutions be encouraged in a conservative political environment?

In addition to the research conducted as part of the GMF fellowship, recommendations presented in this paper and documented in a separate, formal strategic plan to reform regional governance in the Nashville area, are derived from insights gleaned over the last 18 months from the following activities:

- **Research of U.S. Peers.** Research scanned national best practices for coordination and planning across ten metro regions, including the development of an inventory that documents the products, services, funding sources, governance structure, and regional council operational framework for each region.
- **Board Member Involvement.** The two organizations' governing boards appointed members to a joint committee to oversee the exploration

of strategies to improve coordination among communities and regional organizations across Middle Tennessee.

- **Coordination with State and Federal Agencies.** The MPO and GNRC both receive grant funds from several agencies for the assistance they provide in carrying out state and federal programs and services. Representatives from those agencies coordinate the effort to ensure that the adopted recommendations will improve state and federal investment effectiveness.
- **Input from Agency Staff and Non-Profit Organizations.** Improving the coordination between the MPO and GNRC has the potential to elevate the work of the professionals who staff the two organizations and area nonprofit organizations involved in social services, small business assistance, economic and community development, regional infrastructure planning, local land use and zoning, housing, tourism, the arts, and historic preservation. A series of meetings and surveys have been conducted with those professionals throughout the initiative.

Issues and Challenges in the Nashville Area

Over the last two decades, Middle Tennessee has emerged as the state's foremost economic engine, with Nashville recently surpassing Memphis as Tennessee's largest city. The region is on pace to grow from 1.9 million people today to more than 3.3 million by 2040, making it larger than the present-day Denver metro area. Unfortunately, rising household costs and the lack of sufficient infrastructure place continued prosperity at risk. The area ranks poorly or near the bottom nationally for personal health, transportation options, social disparity, and multiple environmental quality indicators, and must find a way to turn the corner in order to adequately support its current population, not to mention future generations. The following are among the most important concerns for regional leaders:

- **Growing Traffic Congestion.** Despite having more lane miles per capita than most of its peers, the Nashville commute ranks seventh worst in the nation

as measured by per capita cost⁵ and traffic congestion is on the rise. Additionally, freight traffic is expected to compound the problem as the tonnage of freight on area roadways is expected to grow by 96 percent by 2040. Without improvement to the operational performance of area roadways and coordinated efforts to improve access to rail and other modal options, the amount of time Middle Tennesseans spend in traffic will more than double by 2040.⁶

- **Lack of Transit Options.** Nashville invests significantly less, \$87.58 per capita, when compared to its peer regions of Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte, Denver, Indianapolis, Louisville, Raleigh, Memphis, and Tampa (average of \$136.23 per capita).⁷ This results in significantly less service to connect residents to jobs and other destinations in the community. Moreover, Nashville currently lacks any local dedicated revenue to fund a capital construction program to build dedicated lane or fixed guideway transit options that will enable residents to avoid traffic congestion.

- **Declining Housing Affordability and Access to Jobs.** The cost of housing in Nashville has risen significantly in recent years, pushing many lower income families to seek housing farther from places of employment. As a whole, this segment of the population is often transit dependent and is disproportionately affected by this trend. For Middle Tennesseans struggling with poor transportation access, decreasing the proximity to their source of income can limit the ability to keep a job. This affects both those attempting to climb out of poverty and businesses needing access to workforce.

- **Physical Inactivity and Deteriorating Public Health.** In 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ranked Tennessee as the most physically inactive city in the nation, and locally, 29 percent of the residents in the Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin MSA are considered obese. Conditions such as obesity, which is directly related to physical inactivity, combined with injuries from vehicular crashes and diseases related to air pollution, cost the United States billions each year in health care costs. Declining public health is due in part to the

built environment of cities and neighborhoods and has led planners and community leaders to reevaluate investments in transportation infrastructure.

- **Workforce Deficits.** With more than 150,000 net new jobs expected in the area over the next ten years, the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce estimates that there will likely be a shortage of about 25,000 workers during that timeframe, even with population growth. Workforce development and training has become a central focus of economic development officials to ensure that the region can continue to provide skilled labor to support growing sectors and emerging industries.

Well-Intended, but Fragmented Collaboration

Popular attention to regionalism in the Nashville area began in 1999 when Vanderbilt University and GNRC convened a regional summit to shine a spotlight on the effects of the area's rapid land development during the 1980s and 1990s. The summit showcased a 1999 study conducted by Neal Peirce of The Citistates Group,⁸ sponsored by the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies, and published in *The Tennessean*. The report presented a broad analysis of the region's assets and challenges, concluding that the Nashville region was on pace to become the next Atlanta — and not in a good way. Images of Atlanta's sprawling development pattern and long commutes began to serve as a catalyst for the formation of new regional groups including:

- **Cumberland Region Tomorrow.** A private, nonprofit, citizen-based regional organization working with public and private partners advocating good planning for the future livability and economic vitality of the region.

- **Leadership Middle Tennessee.** A leadership program founded to engage local community and business leaders in a curriculum focused on the importance of regionalism. The program gives participants a greater understanding of the critical issues and key players across the metropolitan area, motivating them to use their skills to engage in regional initiatives.

⁵ Texas Transportation Institute Urban Mobility Report

⁶ Nashville Area MPO 2040 Travel Demand Forecast Model

⁷ National Transit Database, 2012

⁸ Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson, "The Pierce Report: Hurtling toward Atlanta's Fate,"

Since then, other important nonprofit organizations have formed in order to address key issues, including The Land Trust for Tennessee and the Nashville Civic Design Center, which focus on land conservation and urban design, respectively. Most recently, the Middle Tennessee Mayors Caucus and the Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee were formed to provide forums for political and business leadership to support future investments in regional infrastructure.

Also during the last decade, Nashville business leaders have increasingly recognized the need for a broader geographic constituency to work towards regional economic competitiveness. Out of that need came a partnership, spearheaded by the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, that focuses on creating strategies and plans to encourage regional economic development for the greater metro area. That partnership continues today and is formally known as Partnership 2020.

Today, there are no less than ten individual groups in the public and private sectors, which claim a role in planning for the region's future. While the emergence of those groups is seen as a positive response to the challenges presented at the 1999 regional summit, many are unsatisfied with the pace of progress to improve community outcomes. A 2016 report prepared by John Fregonese⁹ shows that the region has outpaced the growth predicted a decade earlier, and continues to struggle with urban sprawl and its unintended consequences. While it is unfair to suggest that these individual groups have not lived up to their promise, the lack of overall progress does suggest that more effort is needed to align the work of these groups so that regional initiatives are focused on shared goals. More importantly, public sector leaders must do a better job supporting this collaboration among nonprofit organizations, and better position public agencies to incorporate private-sector advocacy into regional policies and plans aimed at developing implementable solutions.

Potential for Institutional Reform

In August 2016, the board members of the Nashville Area MPO and the GNRC entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that established a framework for the two organizations to explore ways

to enhance coordination among local communities and between regional organizations in Middle Tennessee. The agreement created a joint committee of mayors to develop recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of regional decision-making and to better align transportation planning programs with other regional activities related to economic development, infrastructure investment, and quality of life.¹⁰ In short, this MOA set a course of action to evaluate strategies to achieve the following ten shared goals:

1. Simplify and streamline the current process of collaboration among area jurisdictions in order to use the time and resources of local leaders more constructively.
2. Provide a clear and easy single point of access to data, research, and planning activities for private sector organizations interested in regional economic development or quality growth initiatives.
3. Better align existing regional plans and programs with state and local community concerns related to growth and development, workforce and jobs, aging and congested infrastructure, and changing demographics.
4. Bridge the growing divide between rural and urban communities by responding to the unique nature of their respective challenges, and expanding opportunities for communities of all sizes to benefit from regional plans and investments.
5. Strengthen the regional planning portfolio to better link transportation planning and decision-making with other activities related to economic development, land use and design, solid waste management, open space preservation, workforce housing, environmental quality, public health, and other key issues.
6. Grow the menu of services available to local government members to enhance the value of participation in regional organizations.

⁹ Cumberland Region Tomorrow, "Report to the the Region Update: 2016 Regional Growth Pressures.

¹⁰ A website has been created at <http://COG.NashvilleMPO.org> to serve as a resource to members of the Joint Committee, stakeholders, and members of the public who have an interest in the process.

7. Better position regional priorities to the state legislature, state agencies, and the federal government to affect policy and funding decisions.
8. Optimize the use of local funds collected through membership dues and encourage increased funding from the state and federal partners to sustain the required programs.
9. Ensure equity in the governance structure and decision-making of regional agencies so that citizens and stakeholders are appropriately represented in the decision-making process.
10. Better promote the advantages, opportunities, and successes associated with regional cooperation through strengthened brand identity and unified messaging.

The goals were identified through discussions among board members and regional partners about common problems associated with the current framework:

- general confusion among the public about roles, responsibilities, and usefulness of the organizations and agencies involved in regional work;
- misalignment between policies and investments as grant dollars are often trapped within programmatic stovepipes with single-minded purpose;
- lack of leveraging across programs to achieve big objectives as the silos are managed by different organizations and governing bodies;
- overburdened and fatigued local elected officials who often do not realize the full benefit of working together because of the redundancies and inefficiencies of the status quo; and
- lack of local and state agency ownership in regional solutions or clear champions to help advance major public policy initiatives that require funding or innovative approaches.

More About the Two Organizations

The Nashville Area MPO is the federally-designated transportation planning agency for Davidson, Maury, Robertson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson,

and Wilson counties. The MPO fulfills federal transportation planning requirements to ensure the Tennessee Department of Transportation, local governments, and transit agencies remain eligible for federal transportation funds appropriated for improving area roadways and transit systems. An executive board that convenes city and county mayors with local, state, and federal transportation officials adopts MPO policies, plans, and programs. The MPO board is staffed by professional planners and engineers who are housed at the Metropolitan Nashville-Davidson County Planning Department.

The GNRC is one of nine regional development districts established by the General Assembly under the Tennessee Development District Act of 1965. GNRC, which operates as a council of governments (COG), represents 13 counties and 52 cities in Middle Tennessee. County members include Cheatham, Davidson, Dickson, Houston, Humphreys, Montgomery, Robertson, Rutherford, Stewart, Sumner, Trousdale, Williamson, and Wilson counties.

GNRC's mission is to assist local communities and state agencies to create plans and programs that guide growth and development in the most desirable, efficient, and cost effective manner, while ensuring the continued long-term livability of the region. The GNRC is governed by a regional council comprised of city mayors, county mayors/ executives, state legislators, business/industry representatives, minority populations, and employees (nearly 70 full-time staff).

Options for Improved Coordination

Both the Nashville Area MPO and GNRC were created in the 1960s, during a time of increased emphasis on regionalism that spawned in the wake of the fallout from urban renewal projects and major infrastructure projects. Though each provides service within Middle Tennessee, their geographies differ slightly. The MPO serves communities in seven counties more immediately surrounding Nashville, while the GNRC serves 13 counties and includes a greater number of rural communities. The MPO's reach likely will continue to expand as the region's population grows and sprawls further into surrounding areas. While

the MPO and GNRC have different missions and core areas of focus, the issues they address are related and in many ways inseparable.

Lessons from Europe

Travel for the GMF Urban and Regional Policy Fellowship occurred in 2016 and included visits to eight cities across the U.K., Belgium, Italy, and France. Approximately 40 personal interviews were conducted with local practitioners, academics, and elected officials on topics spanning transportation, public health, environmental sustainability, public financing, regional governance, and economic development. One important lesson learned from the journey is that, despite having distinct histories, cultures, politics, governance models, and urban character and design, U.S. and European metros face very similar challenges with respect to housing, infrastructure, and public financing. Moreover, globalization of the economy and media outlets, and the emergence of social communication platforms over the last few years have required planning professionals and local elected officials on each continent to be much more transparent in the development to solutions to those challenges.

While not possible to document all of the findings from the GMF fellowship in the limited scope of this paper, the following sections present the material most significant in the development of recommendations for improving regional collaboration in the Nashville area. They include the emergence of “Combined Authorities” in Northern England; lessons learned from the perceived lack of metropolitan scale transportation planning in Antwerp, Belgium; and the value of a regional strategic plan in Turin, Italy.

Combined Authorities in Northern England

England’s system of regional planning has been actively evolving in recent years as the nation tries to balance its history of a strong central government with an increased call for more regional autonomy. Since 1972, the country has seen a variety of government attempts to enable regional planning initiatives,

including the creation of Metropolitan Counties (1972-85) and Regional Development Agencies (1998-2012).

Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were intended to support economic development through coordinated planning and workforce development, but fell out of favor with local and central government leaders alike after years of criticisms about their lack of transparency in planning for housing development. By 2010, it was clear that the parliament was to abolish the RDAs under mounting fiscal pressures that came with the great recession. While RDAs were technically dissolved by the Parliament in 2012, along with a corresponding requirement for regions to prepare an economic strategy, the legislation affected London a bit differently. Instead, the Greater London Authority endured and would later spark interest in Northern England for another initiative aimed at improving regional coordination.

In 2009, the parliament passed enabling legislation as part of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act that allowed for the voluntary creation of “combined authorities” to provide opportunities for local governments across larger metropolitan areas to work together to deliver public services. Perhaps more significantly than that, these combined authorities also received certain delegated (or devolved) functions and additional revenue powers from the central government to address their region’s transportation and economic development needs. Such delegated decision-making authority had been rare in the United Kingdom especially when compared with the history of delegated federal transportation programming authority in the U.S. to state departments of transportation and metropolitan planning organizations.

Success in Greater Manchester

The most significant driver of the new “Combined Authority” model comes out of the Manchester area. Created in 2011, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) provided the first true formal regional governance board since the Greater Manchester City Council was disbanded following the Local Government Act of 1985. The GMCA brings together representatives from ten local government councils with a regional mayor to provide a forum for planning, coordination, and service delivery across a range of

functional areas including transportation, health, housing, and research. Its transportation programs and services are provided through Transport for Greater Manchester.

The GMCA touts itself as a leader in local and national reforms to improve regional coordination in the U.K., and for good reason. The Association of Greater Manchester Authorities lobbied for the initial concept of the combined authority to serve as a replacement for the Greater Manchester Metropolitan County that was disbanded in 1985, and to provide a forum for regional cooperation with powers similar to the Greater London Authority. In 2012, Greater Manchester struck a major deal with the central government to further devolve federal decision-making authority and funding to local leaders and it continues to be the standard bearer for combined authorities in England. The following were often cited in interviews as keys to success for Greater Manchester:

- **Clear Geographic Identity.** Manchester has a well-defined land development pattern and a strong central city that lends its identity to the greater region. While there are other important communities located within the region, there is little debate over its center of gravity.
- **Engaged and Visionary Leaders.** When speaking with partners of the GMCA, it is clear that much of the credit for success is owed to leadership, specifically that of Sir Richard Leese. Sir Leese has served as the leader of the Manchester City Council since 1996, sits on the board of the GMCA, and is a key player in the Northern Powerhouse, which aims to boost economic growth in northern England through major investments in high speed transportation connections between Liverpool and Leeds. Many in the region, and others across Europe who have followed Manchester's success, say Sir Leese is the energy and driving force behind the rapid evolution of the combined authority model.
- **Focused Objective.** Make no mistake, one of the keys to success for Greater Manchester is its clear objective to compete with London to bring economic success to the north. This clarity of purpose has informed the area leaders' strategies, and has provided the necessary motivation to negotiate with the central government on major reforms.
- **Informed Policymaking.** Manchester prides itself on a commitment to evidence-based decision-making and has invested heavily in data and research to inform its policymaking. Leading the effort is a collaborative called "New Economy," a think-tank type organization that works on behalf of the GMCA and the Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership. New Economy fulfills an important regional need by producing world-renowned research and analysis to shape policies that help increase regional prosperity.
- **Larger than Itself.** The City of Manchester, a significant economic engine of its own, understands that its success depends on the health of the entire metropolitan area. To that end, city leadership not only conducts formal business with other local governments as part of the GMCA, but also fosters ongoing relationships and collaboration through its participation in the more informal Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA). The AGMA is a voluntary organization that advocates and lobbies the national government for policies and programs that are beneficial to the greater Manchester area as a whole. AGMA helps shape policies and programs that are ultimately implemented by the GMCA.

Advocates Activate in Antwerp

Spatial planning in Belgium has largely been defined by the Belgian Law of 1962 when the model transitioned from its primarily passive national approach to one strategically positioned around the three major regions of Flanders, Brussels, and Wallonia. Each of the regions have become more autonomous over the years due to their differences in language, culture, histories, and unique social pressures.

Regarding the planning model, two specific issues were often raised during interviews with practitioners in Belgium. The first was the apparent lack of coordination between Flanders and Brussels when it comes to growth and development planning. Each separate region has their own authority to develop spatial plans, but the Brussels region is completely contained as an island within the geographic footprint of Flanders. This means that much of Brussels' metropolitan area growth is occurring within Flanders, which has little influence itself on the public policies or market conditions in Brussels. The second issue, and the one that is the main focus of this section, is the role of the Flemish Government

in local comprehensive planning. In Belgium, the regional governments are primarily responsible for long-range spatial planning while local planners, like those at AG Vespa in Antwerp, are focused on short-range project-level planning.

Emergence of StRaten Generaal, Failings of BAM

The StRaten Generaal and BAM dynamic proved to be a stumbling block when, in the 1990s, the Flemish Government moved to implement a ring road around Antwerp to alleviate traffic congestion and to provide an additional river crossing north of town.¹¹ While technically contained in the Antwerp masterplan, it is important to note that the local plan is primarily developed by the wider Flemish Government with input from local constituents. As a result, the proposed ring road came as a surprise to many in the community opposed to the project. Out of this early opposition was forged StRaten Generaal,¹² formed in 1999 by citizens who feared the construction of large infrastructure projects seen as threats to the environment and local quality of life. For much of its existence, the roadway project (formerly called the Oosterweel Link) was the primary focus of StRaten Generaal's efforts.

The Beheersmaatschappij Antwerpen Mobiel (BAM), which translates into the Holding Company for Antwerp Mobility, was created in response to the opposition to the ring road. Unfortunately, BAM's effectiveness as a transportation planning and development group was quickly put to test as local opposition groups became aware that BAM was controlled by the Flemish Government. Throughout the first decade of the 21st century, BAM and the Flemish Government continued to face strong opposition to the project, losing many battles along the way. In fact, StRaten Generaal was so successful in empowering the opposition that it effectively negotiated design (e.g., a tunnel instead of a viaduct) and alignment features and played a prominent role in the project's continued planning, engineering, and design.

The Potential for a New Model

As a result of the long process in Antwerp, leaders of StRaten Generaal are now eager to work with the governments of Antwerp and Flanders to establish a new approach to regional transportation planning. The experience with the ring road has left many in the community with doubts about the veracity of the Flemish Government's early claims of the benefits of the project. Moreover, many saw the Flemish Government's establishment of BAM as a way to plant local roots in Antwerp was not seen as authentic.¹³ Specifically, advocates are calling for a long-range transportation plan developed in a public forum by an organization similar to that of MPOs in the United States.

Strategic Planning in Turin

Turin has spent the last two decades undergoing an impressive post-industrial transformation — from a major center of manufacturing and industry to a destination for local and international visitors interested in art, culture, food, and short day trips to the Alps, Barolo Wine Country, or the Mediterranean coast. Recently, local efforts to plan for the region's future, and the development of the Metropolitan City concept in Italy bode well for Turin's continued prosperity.

Emergence of the Metropolitan City Authority

Just like in the U.S., Italy has traditionally recognized four levels of government: national, regional (states), provincial (counties), and municipal. In early 2014, the Italian government elected to essentially eliminate the provincial governments in favor of a new metropolitan city authority that would oversee regional planning, programming of investments, and public services across each of the metropolitan areas of its largest cities. Provincial governments will remain outside of the Metropolitan City, but have a reduced role. Regional governments would step up to provide increased service to communities outside of the Metropolitan Cities.

The goals of the Metropolitan City initiative are to simultaneously reduce government costs while also ensuring that Italy's limited financial resources are

¹¹ www.oosterweelverbinding.be

¹² More information about the organization at stratengeneraal.be

¹³ Based on interview with Manu Claeys, StRaten Generaal

directed to communities with the largest populations facing challenges of continued urbanization. The main functions of the Metropolitan City will be to guide local planning and zoning decisions, and to provide transportation and police services. by a Metropolitan Council, elected and chosen by the mayors and city councilors, governs the new authority.

Evolution of Turin's Regional Strategic Plan

In 2015, Torino Internatzionale produced "Metropolitan Turin 2025," the region's third iteration of its strategic plan¹⁴ initially completed in 2000. The plan focuses on a vision that calls for Turin's continued evolution as an industrial center to a "City of Opportunity" that is engaged globally to attract talent capable of generating innovation through a renewed entrepreneurial spirit.

While the plan does present the newly empowered Metropolitan City form of government as an opportunity for the region to achieve its vision, much of its analysis and fact-finding is focused on the urban and suburban areas immediately surrounding the traditional municipal boundaries of Turin, as the plan was being developed about the same time as the Metropolitan City's establishment. Still, the first of the two strategies identified in the plan is squarely centered on the issue of metropolitan governance (the other relates more directly to workforce training and development). The plan includes the following recommendations related to metropolitan governance:

- adopt a metropolitan scale spatial/land use plan to ensure coordinated land development,
- establish of an agency to oversee metropolitan scale economic development and investment,
- expand the metropolitan mobility agency to oversee continued development of the regional multi-modal transportation system,
- expand and improve the quality of the region's green infrastructure,

- upgrade local sustainability initiatives to the metropolitan scale and establish a regional steering committee and an office of long-term planning or a sustainability officer to guide municipal practices,
- streamline and simplify the administrative process to help promote private investment,
- integrate local and regional social services and reform welfare programs, and
- integrate public finances and public administration procedures.

Making the Most of Regional Governance Reforms

On May 17, 2017, the Nashville Area MPO executive board and the Greater Nashville Regional Council executive committee adopted a joint resolution that documented mutual intent to integrate the MPO programming and administration into the GNRC. Integrated MPOs and regional councils are fairly common in the U.S., especially in larger metro areas like Nashville. In fact, nearly 70 percent of metropolitan statistical areas of a million or more people have an integrated MPO/COG serving the urbanized area, and two more regions are actively integrating their MPO and regional council in San Francisco¹⁵ and Nashville.

These types of organizations have a shared history that dates back to the 1960s, but their evolution has varied across the nation. In Tennessee, the largest local government within its planning area historically staffs and administers MPO transportation policy boards. The alternative is a joint city-county regional planning commission. In many other parts of the U.S., regional organizations carry out the federally-defined MPO functions and requirements, especially when the MPO planning area includes multiple counties and a diverse mix of larger cities, small towns, and rural areas.

There are many benefits of an integrated COG. The three most significant include: 1) better comprehensive planning to prepare the region for growth and

¹⁴ Torino Strategica, "Metropolitan Turin 2025."

¹⁵ Association of Bay Area Governments, "ABAG-MTC Merger."

development; 2) more efficient collaboration among mayors and community leaders with streamlined access to regional data, programs, and services; and 3) the establishment of true regional ownership in the policymaking and daily operations of transportation planning programs and services.

The biggest challenges associated with integration of the MPO into GNRC are related to 1) ongoing communication to ensure that members and key partners understand the game plan for achieving the vision and why, and 2) applying best practices appropriately to make the model work to address for Middle Tennessee's key issues. While there will be several important steps necessary to complete the process of integration, none of them are unreasonable or overly complicated. What is extremely important, however, is the effort to make measurable progress in achieving the ten goals stated earlier in this paper. To that end, staff are developing recommendations for integration based in large part on lessons learned from U.S. peers and from the research gathered from the GMF Urban and Regional Policy Fellowship.

The following are the key considerations identified through research which should be incorporated into the design of the integrated organization to make the most out of reforms to regional governance.

Coordinate Planning for Relevant Issues

First and foremost, collaboration should occur on the issues that are important to the region regardless of federal and state priorities, mandates, or requirements. Yes, those should be incorporated in to its programming, but for a regional council to be effective at the metropolitan scale, it must have the capacity to address the needs that are important and relevant to the local communities it serves. In Middle Tennessee, the top issues in recent years have been transportation, housing affordability, and workforce development.

Next, those issues need to be addressed at the appropriate market level — which sometimes varies by issue. Too often, the geographical boundaries of planning areas for issues like transportation, the environment, solid waste, and economic development are different because they are determined by separate,

and sometimes outdated, planning regulations or legislation. This should not be a distraction, and those predetermined geographies should not be seen as hard lines. What is important is that coordination occur at the scale and across the geography for which problems can be identified and solved.

Provide Private-Sector Leaders a Meaningful Seat at the Table

Some of the most successful regional governance models often go a step further in their collaboration with the private sector to create meaningful opportunities for business and community leaders to be part of the formal regional policymaking process. Incorporating private citizens onto committees and boards of regional council has several benefits. First, it ensures that public policies are not created in a bureaucratic bubble. Private citizens not only tend to have a different perspectives on issues than professional planners, but also think differently about how to communicate those issues with the broader community during planning efforts. Second, the active participation of private-sector leaders in the formal decision-making process could significantly increase the probability of success for public policy initiatives that stem from those efforts, especially those initiatives that promote new strategies or a different approach to addressing community concerns. Initial, or sustained, opposition to policy initiatives is less likely if public and private-sector leadership alike champion solutions.

Invest in Research and Data

While politics are an integral part of any regional planning process, the future is too important to let politics alone shape major investments and policies. The greatest opportunity to balance political influence is through a robust evidence-based program that invests in research and data. Successful regions, or those who are appropriately directing resources at the most effective solutions, rely heavily on data to inform the planning and project prioritization process. Moreover, research and data are key to protecting good public policies from critics. Evidence-based programs allow policymakers and the broader community evaluate trade-offs, measure progress, and make the case for increased resources for successful programs. Moreover, transparency

and public accountability are much easier goals to reach when decisions are traced back to data instead of politics.

Put Regionalism on Public Display

Regional plans and programs have little value if few in the community are aware or understand them. Too often, the products that result from good regional planning are in the form of technical reports and PowerPoints that are difficult to read. Yet, the tools and applications that are developed during the process and the information that they yield have tremendous value to the community if presented in an effective way. Successful regions see this information as a community asset, and have gone to extraordinary lengths to make it accessible and interactive. In Middle Tennessee, partners have begun early conversations about the physical development of a new center for regional collaboration that would host meetings and workshops, exhibit regional plans and initiatives, and provide a museum quality experience for members of the community to learn about the past, present, and future of their region.

Appendix

List of Interview Participants

London/ Cambridge

- Troy Hayes, Principal, Troy Planning & Design
- Lucy Saunders, Public Health Consultant, Transport for London
- Jorn Peters, Senior Planner, Greater London Authority
- Dr. James Wookcock, Mark Taino, Soren Brage, Ali Abbas, and Alvaro Ullrich, Research Team, Centre for Diet and Activity Research, University of Cambridge

Leeds/ Huddersfield/ Manchester

- Dr. Karen Lucas, Professor and Dr. Ian Jones, Research Fellow, Institute for Transport Studies, Leeds University
- Tom Knowland (and staff), Head of Sustainable Energy & Climate, Leeds City Council
- John Henkel, Director of Passenger Services, West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- Paul Roberts, Acting AD Integrated Transport, West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- Colin Blackburn, Head of Infrastructure and Investment, West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- Steve Heckley, Planning Manager, West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- Ian Williams, Policy Director, West Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce
- Alison Millbourn, Health Improvement Practitioner, Kirklees Council
- Sir Richard Leese, Transport Board Chairman, U.K. Northern Powerhouse
- Simon Nokes, Managing Director, Greater Manchester New Economy
- Rod Fawcett, Policy Manager, Transport for Greater Manchester

Antwerp/ Brussels

- Ellen Lamberts, Project Leader, AG Vespa
- Hardwin DeWever, Director of Urban Renewal Projects, AG Vespa
- Griet Geerinck, Flemish Saving Fund
- An Rekkers, Director, VRP
- Manu Claeys, Advocate, StRaten Generaal

- Koen Derkinderen, Head of General Policy, Deputy Prime Minister's Office for Flemish Government
- Martijn De Bruijin, Project Manager, Ministry of Spatial Planning for Flemish Government

Turin

- Anna Prat, Director, Torino Strategica
- Simone Mangili, Staff, Torino Strategica
- Matteo Robiglio, Researcher, Politecnico di Torino
- Cesare Paonessa (and staff), Director, MTA
- Carlo Alberto, Politecnico di Torino
- Gianfranco Bordone (and staff), Director, Regione Piemonte
- Marco Cantamessa, President, Politecnico Incubator
- Chiara Lucchini, Architect, Urbann Center Metropolitano
- Marco Orlando, Director, ANCI Piemonte
- Carlo Della Pepa, Mayor, Municipality of Ivrea

Paris

- Laurent Perrin, Senior Urban Planner, IAU-IDF
- Catherine Sabbah, Journalist, Les Echos

Acknowledgments

I am extremely thankful to The German Marshall Fund of the United States for making this research possible and for providing the opportunity to make invaluable connections with professionals across Europe. Thank you to all the incredible people who agreed to interviews and special thanks to Ellen Lamberts (Antwerp, Belgium) and Anna Pratt and Simone Mangili (Turin, Italy) for showing me so much of your wonderful city-regions.

This experience would not have been conceivable if it were not for the flexibility of the Nashville Area MPO and Greater Nashville Regional Council board leadership. I am forever grateful to the Mayor Kenneth Wilber, Mayor Randall Hutto, and Mayor Ken Moore for permitting me to spend six weeks away from the office, and to Michelle Lacewell for managing MPO staff and programs while I was away exploring Europe.

G | M | F The German Marshall Fund
of the United States
STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION

Washington • Ankara • Belgrade • Berlin
Brussels • Bucharest • Paris • Warsaw

www.gmfus.org