

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL *of* GOVERNMENTS

Board of Directors Policy Focus & Priorities: 2009

COG Board of Directors Leadership

Chairman Penelope Gross, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
Vice Chairman Kwame Brown, Council of the District of Columbia
Vice Chairman Andrea Harrison, Prince George's County Council

Background

COG's Vision: The members of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) envision the National Capital Region as the best place to live, work, play and learn.

COG's Mission: COG fosters regionalism – by promoting regional partnerships, developing best practices, applying cutting-edge technologies, and providing a forum for discussion and decision-making. The COG Board of Directors is responsible for overseeing COG's mission and implementing its work program and activities.

The most challenging issues facing the metropolitan Washington region require a long-term vision and commitment to action. As a voluntary association of local governments, COG educates area policy officials as to the regional challenges and identifies and encourages the implementation of solutions built around consensus. While COG has an impressive record of achievement using this approach, solutions are not often easily reached and rarely can be completed in the one-year term of office for its policy boards and committees.

Beginning in 2004, the COG Board of Directors committed to a sustained focus on growth and development. The foundation for this policy focus is COG's adopted Strategic Plan and the goals and strategies centered on growth issues. This focus does not preclude COG's leadership and involvement on a wide-range of policies and programs; rather, it is intended to help provide a framework for potentially disconnected actions and better organize COG's ongoing and new work. This focus also complements and leverages the priorities and activities of COG's two independent policy boards, the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) and the Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee (MWAQC).

Goal: Promote balanced, sustainable growth and livable communities.

Strategies: Identify and disseminate best management principles, practices, and policies for sustainable growth and livable communities; establish regional consensus on principles, practices and policies for sustainable growth and livable communities; and facilitate dialogue among competing stakeholders.

The adopted policy focus embraces partnerships with organizations and stakeholders with varied perspectives on this issue. The policy focus also acknowledges that there is no "one size fits all" approach to balanced, sustainable growth, and that COG's efforts in this area will address the needs of core, inner suburban and outer suburban

jurisdictions. However, COG believes that sharing information, challenging past assumptions, and educating public officials on best practices and new growth and development tools holds great promise for the balanced, sustainable growth and livable communities we seek.

In addition, the proposed policy focus and priorities anticipate that COG will continue to examine and address “big”, multi-jurisdictional issues that are truly regional in scale and for which COG is ideally suited to respond. Finally, the proposed areas of focus are consistent with COG’s FY 2009 – FY 2010 work program and budget, which stresses completion of current goals and projects, progress on high-priority tasks, and very limited new initiatives.

Policy Focus and Priorities

New Activities in 2009

1. Regional Workforce Preparation

COG’s Strategic Plan speaks to economic development and competitiveness and also educational opportunities for children and adults; however, its policy structure and programs have limited focus on education and workforce training. Other regional organizations exist to address specific segments or elements of education and workforce training. Also, historically COG has been an organization of general purpose local governments and has not included elected or appointed school board officials or school administrators. The region’s continued economic vitality will require continued focus on education and workforce training, especially in light of aging and special needs populations.

At a time of immense economic pressure, including growing unemployment in the private and public sectors, strengthening the capacity of the National Capital Region to meet current and future employee needs is paramount. Responsibility for workforce education and training is shared by a wide-range of federal, state and local government agencies and other regional and sub-regional organizations and institutions. Ensuring that the region is well-positioned to emerge from the current economic crisis more resilient and competitive will require a better understanding how the workforce systems currently perform and anticipate and prepare for the likely labor market needs of the next five to 20 years. Partners in this effort may include area K-12, community college and higher education institutions; workforce investment boards and councils; and chambers of commerce and business development organizations, among others.

Action: The COG Board will appoint a Regional Workforce Competitiveness Task Force to oversee this effort, develop a work plan and schedule, work with partner organizations, and produce a report and recommendations by December 2009. The Task Force will seek opportunities for new partnerships or regional pilot programs with key federal agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Labor.

2. Economic Sustainability and Recovery

The current economic challenges facing our region and nation also hold the promise of opportunity to reassess strengths and weaknesses and emerge more resilient and better able to compete nationally and globally. Information gathered and presented by COG may hold great value to its members in evaluating strategies for pursuit of new technology applications, new markets such as “green collar” jobs, and build on the strengths of the federal government, which is assuming new roles in the national and global economy. Policy advocacy by the Brookings Institution, the Regional Plan Association and the National Association of Region Councils stresses that coherent, collaborative regional approaches will help define future economic success. In addition, through its member services and coordination, COG can play an influential role in aiding local governments in developing multi-jurisdictional service agreements and other tools to achieve economies of scale in the delivery of public services.

Action: The COG Board will make economic sustainability and recovery a priority in 2009, focusing on the following tasks: a) identification of new policies or programs in the Federal stimulus legislation or other federal program that may provide opportunities for a regional pilot program or new collaborative effort, e.g. possible

regionalization of energy conservation programs targeted at area households; b) partnering with the private sector to accelerate recommendations for green collar job training and business development included in COG climate change, energy and green building policy recommendations; and c) identification (with the support of the Chief Administrative Officers Committee and other key program committees) of opportunities for expanded or enhanced multi-jurisdictional service agreements, e.g. cooperative purchasing and the regional health care coalition.

Policy Focus and Priorities

Continuing in 2009

1. Greater Washington 2050

The COG Board of Directors approved the Greater Washington 2050 initiative in December 2007. Greater Washington 2050 builds on extensive discussion over the past two years concerning the scope and impact of COG's regional planning activities and ways to improve outcomes and regional quality of life. Greater Washington 2050 has the potential to expand the time horizon for regional planning, the scope of area jurisdictions involved, to engage new partners, and strengthen the impact and effectiveness of regional planning tools and products. This effort is an ambitious, 12 to 18 month program.

Action: The COG Board will provide continued policy guidance and oversight on the Greater Washington 2050 initiative, working with the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition to complete this 2009. The Coalition will advance a proposed regional compact, principles, and measures or metrics, plus an implementation of how this work will be incorporated within COG by July 2009 for presentation at the COG annual retreat and subsequent outreach to area governments, business and community stakeholders. The COG Board will act on recommendations by November 2009.

2. Metro Funding

COG, the Greater Washington Board of Trade and the Federal City Council jointly established a "blue ribbon panel" in late 2004 to examine the need for dedicated funding for Metro. The panel released its report in January 2005 calling for a regional approach to dedicated funding for Metro, which was subsequently endorsed by the COG Board of Directors and the TPB. Congress approved authorizing legislation in 2008 that now requires funding action by the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia, in addition to amendment by all parties of the WMATA compact and federal appropriations.

Action: The COG Board will continue its outreach and advocacy in support of Metro dedicated funding and will collaborate with the TPB, state departments of transportation and the region's congressional delegation to ensure greater sustained funding for WMATA.

3. Climate Change

After more than a year of work by a special Climate Change Steering Committee established in 2007, the COG Board adopted a comprehensive report and recommendations in November 2008. The report set regional targets for reduction in greenhouse gases, from both transportation and land use activity. The report also outlined efforts to mitigate likely climate change, establish financing mechanisms, launching a regional outreach and education campaign, and promote local government leading by example.

Action: The COG Board will review and adopt committee and staff organizational structure and modified COG work plan and budget to permit COG to advance the short- and long-term goals outlined in the report. COG Board action, including a possible new Energy and Climate Change Policy Committee, is anticipated in April 2009. A major focus for 2009 is preparation of a regional strategy for meeting the 2012 reduction target.

4. Housing

Almost since its inception, affordable housing has been a policy focus for COG. COG's attention has focused on housing production, preservation and rehabilitation, housing affordability and homelessness, and more

recently mortgage foreclosure. At COG's December 2006 annual membership luncheon, former HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros challenged COG to re-examine their regional and local housing policies to address a seven-point housing continuum, ranging from shelters and transitional housing for the homeless to move up and long-term homeownership. Affordable housing is closely linked to overall regional growth and development policies and the absence of affordable housing near regional employment centers exacerbates transportation congestion. COG's renewed attention to housing comes at a critical time as declining housing value and a sharp increase in mortgage foreclosures present new challenges.

Action: The COG Board will address four housing-related goals in 2009: a) expansion of the policy oversight of the Metropolitan Development Policy Committee to foster greater coordination between housing and growth and development policies; b) COG Board examination and adoption of housing production targets to provide regional measures of achievement in housing production, preservation and rehabilitation; c) acceleration and expansion of COG's data collection and forecasting on housing-market trends, including foreclosure activity; and d) development and implementation of a public-outreach effort center on workforce housing and measurement of its effectiveness.

Policy Focus and Priorities

Highlighted Policy, Program, and Administrative Issues

1. **The Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Policy Committee** will examine renewed efforts and funding required to address unmet Chesapeake Bay restoration goals. The committee will also prepare a major update to COG's Chesapeake Bay policy vision in response to the evolution of the Chesapeake Bay program from a voluntary, cooperative program to a regulatory program.
2. **The Anacostia Restoration Program** will continue to advocate on behalf of federal funding through the Water Resources Development Act for its partnership activities. Obtaining federal funding is seen as critical for meeting Anacostia and Chesapeake restoration goals. The effort in 2009 will focus on implementation of the "Action Agenda" adopted last year, as well as completion of the Corps of Engineers Anacostia Restoration Plan that is a central focus of the Anacostia Partnership.
3. **The Aviation Policy Committee** will examine its organizational structure and policy and programmatic goals and present the COG Board with recommendations for re-organization in 2009.
4. COG will continue to strengthen its **outreach to state elected officials** in 2009, developing targeted communication tools and strengthening ties and collaboration with existing state-focused public interest organizations. COG will also launch regular **outreach with the region's congressional delegation** in 2009 to foster improved regional-federal coordination and advocacy.
5. COG management will identify, recommend COG Board action and implement new measures to **increase revenue and reduce expenses** in 2009 and ongoing. Examples include seeking sponsors for key COG special meetings and events; distribution of the COG work program and budget on CD and web with only limited printing that reduce expenses by more than half compared with last year; and the combination of the annual report and regional directory to a single publication to ensure greater visibility with reduced printing cost.