



**STATEMENT OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL VICE PRESIDENT ROGER BERLINER
UPON BEING ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE
METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS**

JANUARY 13, 2016

Let me begin by thanking you, my COG colleagues, for entrusting me with the responsibility to Chair our Board of Directors for the next year. I only hope I am able to handle my duties as well as my able predecessors.

I believe this is a particularly important time for COG. A time when so many in our metropolitan area are looking for real regional leadership to address real issues. And there is no organization that is better positioned to answer that call than COG.

With your support, it is my hope that our primary focus for this next year will be on two specific sets of issues fundamental to the future of our region – WMATA and our regional economy. It is not an accident that both of these issues are prominent on our agenda today.

Every member of this Board appreciates how important WMATA and Metro is to our region's future. It is an organization that simply cannot fail. And I believe we now have a General Manager at the helm who will not let that happen. I know we all look forward to hearing his thoughts and priorities in a few moments.

But we must aspire to more than simply not failing. Our region deserves and expects a world class system. And while it is the job of the GM, Board of Directors, and employees to address the safety, reliability, and financial issues that have bedeviled this agency for far too long, it is our job, the job of regional leaders, to make sure that we are stepping back, asking the bigger questions, and helping to forge a consensus that can guide its future.

In just a couple of months, on March 27th, Metro will be 40 years old. It is a great time to ask what we have learned in these 40 years, and more importantly, what do we want it to be in the next 40 years? Do we need, for example, to revisit the compact, to address dedicated funding, to reassess fundamental governance issues? These issues are fundamentally the responsibility of our broader regional community – electeds, business, riders, and taxpayers, and COG is the logical and appropriate convener for those conversations.

With the Board's concurrence, I would like our staff to work with the Board of Trade and others to create a forum on the 40th anniversary that would kick off a year of examination of these and other issues that we collectively consider critical to the future of Metro. This would not be a forum that focuses on the failures of the past, but rather a forum that helps envision a brighter future, a forum that might be called Metro: The Next 40 Years. I would ask staff to report back to the Board at our meeting next month on the details of this forum and a broader plan for how we can follow up the forum with additional, more narrowly focused dialogues that could lead to a series of recommendations at the end of the year.

The second priority of the year is growing our regional economy. This Board knows as well as any that our region's economy has suffered more than almost any region in the country over the past few years. Our reliance on federal spending has made us vulnerable. Too vulnerable. And now we need, as a region, to think and act differently.

For one, we must begin to put aside our deeply entrenched competitive instincts, instincts that constantly cause us to cannibalize our own. We have for far too long approached economic development regionally as though it were a zero sum game. It can not be. We must grow the pie and collaboration must replace competition if we are to succeed as a region. And each of us will do better if we are successful as a region.

The Global Cities Initiative is one means and manifestation of making collaboration the new regional mantra – we grow as a region by supporting our local businesses export their expertise and products. And if the experience of the other 28 communities that have done this work is any guide, the collaboration that is fostered in this effort begins to permeate and spread throughout the culture of the region. That would be good thing for us.

We are also working hard to make 2016 a year that COG leads a trade mission. Like many of you I suspect, I have gone to foreign lands championing my county. And as strong as my county is, what makes the conversation happen is that we are on the doorstep of the world's capitol. We need collectively to embrace that reality, act on it, and promote *Greater Washington*, knowing that each of us will then have greater opportunities as a result.

Thank you for indulging me as I share my goals as Chair for the year. I do so look forward to working with each of you and our partners in making this a great year for COG and our region.