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## A turning point for Metro to revamp its board structure.

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GETTING MORE money for Metro is a fool's errand as long as the governance of the rail and transit system is so dysfunctional. That harsh conclusion by a task force of local government and business leaders attributes much of Metro's decline to a governing structure that is outdated and ineffective. The group's recommendation for an overhaul of how the system is run is an urgent call to action that should prod the District's mayor and the governors of Maryland and Virginia to take a stronger role in fixing the system.

The task force organized by the Greater Washington Board of Trade and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments presents a damning indictment of the 16-member multi-jurisdictional board that oversees the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). No accountability, blurred responsibilities and a lack of cohesiveness have caused regional needs to take a back seat to parochial interests. Meddling by board members helps explain the churn of general managers in the past five years. The 35-page report recommends an overhaul of how Metro is governed and calls for formation of a commission - of the state and local officials who were signatories to the compact that formed WMATA - to make the necessary improvements and hold the board accountable.

The report makes some common-sense recommendations that the board itself should immediately implement. Instead of rotating the chairmanship among jurisdictions for one-year stints, the board should pick a regionally focused chair who would serve a longer term. Other changes - such as allowing selection of a chairman from outside the board's membership to a four-year term - would require revisions to the WMATA compact, which requires buy-in from the original signatories and approval from Congress. Some changes are presented as suggestions; we wish that the group had been more forceful in arguing against elected officials serving on the board and the veto that every jurisdiction wields on decisions.

No doubt task force members were mindful of the delicate regional and political interests at play and the need to broker consensus from three jurisdictions. The idea of a stronger role for the Virginia governor already has some Northern Virginia officials worrying about a loss of clout. Clearly, the jurisdictions that write Metro's checks and whose residents have the biggest stake need to be at the table, but the task force correctly points out that appointments to the board are made with little regard to the needs of the system. More thought must be given to the expertise and background and balance of the board.

With Metro searching for a new general manager, it's more important than ever to fix the governance problems that handicapped previous leaders. D.C. Mayor-elect Vincent C. Gray (D), Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) and Virginia Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R) need to take immediate action.

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