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Initial MZ Strategies Region Forward Assessment for MWCOG

The following key findings are based upon interviews and focus groups with Coalition members and COG staff conducted by Mariia Zimmerman of MZ Strategies during December 2014.

1) The Coalition is an important venue, but is failing to meet its potential. Three requirements of any coalition are 1) it have a clear purpose, 2) it leads to actions that move forward a shared agenda, and 3) members see the value of collaborating rather than working individually.

2) Meeting structure and frequency are a challenge to sustaining momentum. Meetings need clear theme, clarity around the connection between the topic and the Region Forward vision/ goals/targets and opportunities for action, and more time for discussion among members. Remote meeting participation, social media, and other digital forums should be used to greater effect.

3) COG staff need to be proactive and support leadership in driving Region Forward agenda and push communications more broadly. Staff must draw and articulate linkages between the Region Forward vision and implementation opportunities. Time should be spent to re-engage local jurisdictions and the business community to get their feedback and renewed commitment to the Region Forward vision.

4) Economic Competitiveness is a powerful theme for 2015 that connects the Vision and Four Pillars with regional action. Use the January 23 meeting to introduce economic competitiveness as a theme for the year to explore relevant trends, their implications for COG and the Coalition, and actions individual jurisdictions, institutional players, and major employers are taking to ensure the region's long-term competitiveness. Focus subsequent meetings on key sub-themes, i.e. housing; workforce development & education, sequestration/business climate and/or transportation networks to connect activity centers

5) Elevate and rebrand Region Forward with a State of the Region report and forum. Use the upcoming benchmarking progress report to serve as a State of the Region report that could be the focal point for a high-profile regional conversation around the future of the region. Focus the report on a subset of performance targets meaningful for economic competitiveness. A work group could be created to help inform this update, and potentially invite representatives of the business community and key educational institutions.

6) Leverage and re-align existing technical assistance opportunities to support Activity Centers and Place + Opportunity. Link existing programs such as the Transportation/Land Use Connections (TLC) program and Transportation Alternatives Program with Region Forward. Tailoring or creating a component of TLC focused on activity centers and implementing concepts from Place + Opportunity could be a way to link Region Forward with the LRTP.