

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

2011 Board of Directors Policy Focus and Priorities

COG Board of Directors Leadership

Chairman Andrea Harrison, Prince George's County Council
Vice Chairman Frank Principi, Prince William Board of County Supervisors
Vice Chairman Phil Mendelson, District of Columbia Council

Region Forward is our **Vision**.

It's a commitment by COG and its 21 member governments, who together seek to create a more accessible, sustainable, prosperous, and livable National Capital Region.

Our **Mission** is to make Region Forward happen.

We will do this by being a discussion forum, expert resource, issue advocate, and catalyst for action.

Change. Can an organization comprised of more than 250 local, state and federal elected officials, supported by public sector managers and staff be a catalyst for change in the National Capital Region? At key moments in the history of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments the answer has been --- yes. From working with President Lyndon Johnson to create a local air pollution act that became a model around the nation to encouraging the full build out of the Metrorail system to prioritizing regional coordination on homeland security following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, COG has consistently worked to move the region forward.

What will drive the next era of change? Region Forward. Adopted in 2010 by the COG Board of Directors and all 21 of COG's member local governments, it will fuel that change, both within the organization and in the region as a whole. Region Forward is the lens that sharpens the focus of COG's work.

Two forces will help shape COG's Region Forward implementation in 2011. The first is the extraordinary fiscal challenges facing local and state governments struggling to recover from the recession. We simply cannot afford business as usual and will need to innovate and leverage resources in new ways. As Richard Florida notes in *The Great Reset*, this downturn, while painful, has provided us with a unique opportunity to remake ourselves and generate new economic growth and prosperity. Second, the language of public policy and regionalism has begun to shift. The concept of sustainability --- one of the four pillars that form the foundation of Region Forward, along with Livability, Accessibility and Prosperity --- is gaining traction. Calls for regional approaches to seemingly intractable challenges are heard more frequently and with greater clarity.

There are three documents that guide COG's work. The Strategic Plan, updated in 2011 to fully integrate Region Forward, is a multi-year vision for the region that outlines how COG can help achieve that vision. The Work Program and Budget, updated every fiscal year, allocates funding throughout COG's various programs to support the Strategic Plan. The COG Board of Directors has a hand in shaping both the Strategic Plan and the Budget; however, this document, the Board of Directors Policy Focus and Priorities, which is updated every year as the new Board leadership takes office, is the Board's most direct opportunity to determine specific actions to bring about COG's vision.

Region Forward Implementation

In 2010, all of COG's member jurisdictions adopted Region Forward as a guide for growth and development. Now we must turn that support into action by making policy decisions to meet Region Forward's Accessibility, Sustainability, Livability, and Prosperity targets.

Background

The maiden cruise of Region Forward will be launched in 2011. More than two years of work by the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition, COG member governments and networks of public and community stakeholders has positioned COG to both lead and partner in changing the direction of regionalism to one of regionally-adopted goals and performance measures, a feedback mechanism to acknowledge and celebrate achievement, and capabilities to flag and suggest when regional performance targets are not met. Region Forward is not a stand-alone initiative, but rather a guiding principle for all of COG's work and support for its member jurisdictions.

Actions

- Establish Region Forward Coalition, a new multi-jurisdictional and multi-sector stakeholder group to oversee work and support the COG Board of Directors.
- Develop and release 2011 benchmark report for Region Forward targets and performance measures.
- Engage COG member governments and other Region Forward stakeholders to create a new Complete Communities map as the successor to COG's regional activity centers.
- Pursue an aggressive community outreach campaign on Region Forward that creates opportunities for meaningful community dialogue and support.
- Build the Region Forward website and blog to become an active source for timely information on implementation, best practices and a forum for dialogue.
- Reconvene federal partner agencies and area public officials to agree on specific federal-regional initiatives that will align with Region Forward and support identified regional industry clusters.

Economic Growth

As the region continues to climb out of the recession, it is critically important to focus on policies and programs that stimulate the economy, promote job growth and retention, and strengthen the workforce to compete for jobs and careers of the future. Region Forward is built on a foundation of sustained economic prosperity that begins to bridge the economic and equity gaps found in many communities in the region.

Background

By almost any measure --- income, job creation, or housing value --- the region has fared far better in the recession and its recovery-in-progress than almost any other part of the country. Area officials are not satisfied with that assessment. A sustained period of fiscal austerity at all levels of government will both limit the public policy tools successfully used in past economic recoveries, and drive the innovation needed to find new tools for fiscal recovery and health. While many now recognize that metropolitan areas are the nation's economic engines, public sector policies, laws and regulations are largely de-coupled from regions, fostering fragmentation, duplication and gaps. In 2011, COG will focus on building on regional strengths, leveraging limited resources and linking government and private sector activities to create a more cohesive regional approach to economic growth.

Actions

- Define and foster the use of regional industry clusters in collaboration with key state and federal agencies and business partners. Clusters can provide a blueprint for rebuilding and refining the region's economic foundation on which job creation, education and training and prosperity depend.
- Identify and pursue infrastructure and other investments that spur economic activity. COG, under the direction of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board, received a Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) federal stimulus grant in 2010. The COG Board will seek input from TPB on both the job and economic impacts of this effort and opportunities for other targeted infrastructure investments and federal funding opportunities.
- COG's cooperative purchasing program has long been held out as a practical example of regional collaboration. The Chief Administrative Officers Committee (area city and county managers) will launch an examination of local programs that could benefit from shared services.
- Implement pilot program, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutritional Services, to boost federal economic assistance to needy families in the region. Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (food stamps) benefits too often go unused because families are unaware of their eligibility or how to apply; this trend can be reduced through greater community outreach.

WMATA Governance Reform

COG partnered with the Greater Washington Board of Trade in 2010 to support a public-private sector task force that recommended a number of short-term and long-term governance reforms. Many if not all Region Forward goals depend on a successful regional transit system that provides mobility for residents and visitors in the region.

Background

Region Forward principles of sustainability, livability, accessibility and prosperity all hinge on the successful performance of Metro, which moves an average of 1.2 million passengers daily and continues to set record levels of ridership on routine work-days. Growing concerns with safety, reliability, performance and the long-term funding requirements of Metro prompted the independent, fresh-look study by the task force and parallel studies by the Metro Riders Advisory Council and the U.S. General Accountability Office.

Actions

- Engage key COG policy boards and committees on the task force's findings and recommendations.
- Keep Washington area public officials informed of ongoing WMATA governance review and implementation actions by local, state and federal officials and WMATA compact authorities and appointing organizations.
- In addition to governance reform, adequate dedicated funding is essential to WMATA's success. COG will continue to lead the call for this critical funding.

Regional Incident Response

Two years in a row, the region has struggled to prepare for and recover from winter storms. First in the 2009-2010 winter, and most recently in January 2011, advances in weather forecasting were not enough to put the region back to work and ensure the safety of families in their home or on transit and roads. Prolonged and/or unnecessary closures of businesses, schools, and governments inhibit progress on Region Forward's Prosperity goals.

Background

It is difficult to convince residents and businesses that the region has a vision for the future if it can't meet basic public service requirements. Millions of dollars have been invested in emergency planning, coordination and response since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Transportation officials have new technologies to foster communication and collaboration and officials now routinely make local, state and federal decisions about government operations in a regional context. Yet, many elected officials, business leaders and the public question why region struggles to maintain electric power, clear roads, and provide reliable transit service during even modest snow events. COG's Snow Forum in April 2010 contributed to changes in Federal closure and telework policies that have helped, but were still not enough to prevent unprecedentedly long commutes on snow and vehicle clogged roads on January 26. COG's unique relationships and roles in transportation and emergency management provide a strong foundation to build a more effective response capability and manage public expectations.

Actions

- Identify and align COG technical and staff capacity to examine ongoing snow response and recovery issues, including electric power restoration and traffic and transit management to ensure public safety and mobility. Leverage existing capacity, for example transportation modeling and partnership with the Metropolitan Area Transportation Operations Coordination (MATOC) program.
- The COG Board will monitor and coordinate work undertaken within COG, as well as in partnership with business, transportation and utility providers to advance specific recommendations by the summer, so that resources and implementation can be achieved well in advance of the 2011-2012 winter.

Climate Change and Energy Conservation

The development of clean energy and tools for greater energy efficiency are projected to be future areas of major economic growth. Both are essential to meeting the greenhouse gas emissions reductions adopted in the National Capital Region Climate Change Report and Region Forward.

Background

In 2009, the COG Board of Directors created the Climate Energy and Environment Policy Committee (CEEPC) to guide implementation of the Board's policy goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In January 2010, the CEEPC adopted its "2010-2012 Regional Climate and Energy Action Work Plan" which contains a series of regional and local government actions and specific performance measures and deadlines to reduce energy use and meet the 2012 target for emission reduction. The CEEPC action plan includes several initiatives that directly support local and regional economic development and job creation, especially in the green building, alternative fueled vehicles, energy conservation and renewable energy elements of the plan.

Actions

- Prepare greenhouse gas emissions inventories and plans to reduce emissions and conserve energy from government operations;
- Develop a system for tracking progress toward greenhouse emission reduction goals and prepare annual progress updates; and issue the first "Progress Report" on implementation of the Climate and Energy Action Plan;
- Develop partnerships to fund and implement a regional public education campaign on energy efficiency. A detailed briefing for the COG Board on the progress report is planned for spring 2011.

Foreclosure Reduction & Prevention

Ensuring an adequate provision of affordable housing is necessary to maintain economic competitiveness, to attract employees and employers to the region, and to minimize the prospect of foreclosure. A housing sector that corresponds to the housing needs of the population will help greatly in achieving the Prosperity and Livability goals in Region Forward.

Background

Many jurisdictions in the region continue to face a foreclosure crisis that is eroding years of progress in community revitalization and wealth creation. In 2010, COG partnered with the Urban Institute, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and the Nonprofit Roundtable of Greater Washington to establish the Capital Area Foreclosure Network (CAFN). CAFN provides support to front-line organizations and local coalitions working with at-risk residents; conducts regional and sub-regional marketing and outreach campaigns urging residents to get help and warning them of the dangers of foreclosure rescue scams, researches and analyzes regional foreclosure data and trends to better target resources and identify service delivery gaps; and provides more in-depth targeted assistance to hardest hit jurisdictions. COG serves as the fiscal agent for CAFN, and COG's Director of Community Planning and Services is Co-chair of CAFN's leadership.

Actions

- Increase the Capital Area Foreclosure Prevention Fund, and provide additional grants to organizations engaged in housing counseling and foreclosure assistance.
- Expand CAFN's Hispanic Homeownership Task Force, created to focus resources for foreclosure prevention assistance for Latino homeowners.
- Continue to provide policy officials and other stakeholders with detailed research and trends analysis to mitigate foreclosures and their impact on the region's economy.

Chesapeake Bay Restoration

The Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in the United States and has a watershed housing 16.6 million people (over a third of which live in COG member jurisdictions). Improving the Bay's health, while also encouraging growth and development, is central to COG's work program and a major Region Forward goal.

Background

In December 2010, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a "pollution diet" for the Chesapeake Bay. Officially known as "Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)," the pollution diet establishes strict limits for nutrient and sediment pollution to restore the Chesapeake Bay's health. COG's member governments have long contributed to Bay restoration efforts, greatly enhancing nutrient removal at area wastewater plants, and taking a leadership role in controlling urban stormwater pollution. However, the new Bay TMDL and its supporting "watershed implementation plans" will require further actions by local governments. In addition, EPA and the Bay watershed states are pursuing increasingly stringent requirements for TMDLs that address local water quality problems. These regulatory pressures are leading to, among other things, expensive requirements to retrofit stormwater control into existing urban areas and may lead to constraints on growth and development.

Actions

- Analyze EPA and state proposals for Chesapeake Bay Restoration. Provide feedback to the Chesapeake Bay Program on the proposed Watershed Implementation Plans.
- Develop regional recommendations for stormwater policy in response to the Bay TMDL and local water quality regulations.
- Pursue additional funding from state and federal governments to assist local governments in meeting Bay restoration goals.
- Educate local government officials and the public about the Bay TMDL and the challenges that local governments face in meeting regulatory requirements for wastewater and stormwater.
- Broaden the focus of water quality improvement efforts to include considerations of energy use, greenhouse gas emission and green infrastructure investment.

Anacostia Restoration Program

The Anacostia Watershed Restoration Partnership will build upon the Anacostia Restoration Plan developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in cooperation with COG and the Partnership, by developing an implementation strategy during 2011. This strategy, to be formalized during an April, 2011 Partnership retreat, is expected to address innovative opportunities for funding high priority restoration projects; coordination of regulatory permit requirements for managing urban stormwater that help achieve Anacostia restoration goals; outreach and education for local, state and federal elected officials on the environmental and economic development benefits of restoration of the most heavily polluted urban watershed in the region; and consideration of Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan requirements for the Anacostia watershed.

Census 2010 Analysis

In April 2010, residents of metropolitan Washington participated in the decennial census of population and housing which will be the basis for legislative redistricting this year. Annual releases of the newest Census product – the American Communities Survey (ACS) – will provide the region with detailed population and housing statistics for counties, cities and neighborhoods throughout the region. ACS data will offer an unprecedented opportunity to analyze communities throughout the region and provide invaluable tools for monitoring and mapping the progress of the population, housing and labor force goals and targets of Region Forward. COG will prepare regular, topical reports drawn from the annual ACS Census data, benchmarking the results to Region Forward goals, targets and indicators.

Local, State, & Federal Outreach

Building and maintaining strong partnerships with member officials is a critical component to achieving COG's vision. Ensuring that all jurisdictions, large and small, are aware of COG programs and activities that leverage resources and help them meet their goals will be a priority. COG will continue to advocate the priorities of our region through outreach to local, state and federal leaders. We will renew efforts to convene an annual caucus of the National Capital Region Congressional Delegation and hold regular meetings with their staff as federal activity on transportation funding, environmental protection and economic development continue to pose significant implications for the region.

COG's Fiscal Management

COG staff will provide the COG Board of Directors and members with timely information necessary to exercise oversight of the organization's budget and fiscal management at a time of continued limited resources. Health care and pension cost management issues will be a focus in 2011, along with implementation of necessary capital repair/replacement plan investments in the COG building and office space. Management will also engage the COG Board and members in review of new population data to support the proposed FY 2013 membership assessment.