

**GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE IN THE UNITED STATES:
INCREMENTAL PROGRESS TOWARD REGIONAL
GOVERNMENT OR MORE OF THE STATUS QUO?**

DISCUSSION POINTS

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The Overall Structure of Government in the United States (US)

As is clearly indicated in Table 1 the structure of government in the US is complex in its mixture having multiple levels of government--federal, state, and four levels of local government. It is also expansive in the number of governmental jurisdictions. They presently total just slightly fewer than 90,000 jurisdictions. The downward change in the total number of governments in the fifty-five years between 1952 and 2007 has been considerable (24%). It is even more pronounced if one goes back prior to 1952.

However, the dramatic change has been focused in a decline in school districts (81%) and a sharp growth in the number of special districts (303%). The remaining local jurisdictions have changed but by far less. They are primarily municipal/township (6%).

As an aside it is interesting to note that the total number of jurisdictions was reported as in excess of 155,000 in 1942, 73% more than in 2007. These numbers highlight the complexity of the US governmental structure in terms of sheer numbers. This complexity is exacerbated when one takes into account which governments undertake which functions, that is, who does what? Functional assignment and execution varies widely across the sub-federal jurisdictions as is reflected in the budgets of these units.

Metropolitan Government in the US

The "piece" of the government structure puzzle that is conspicuously missing from the data in Table 1 is anything that pertains to regional

(metropolitan) government. The US Office of Management and Budget is the gatekeeper for establishing metropolitan statistical areas (MSA). These are

Table 1
Trend in Number of Governments in the United States: 1952 to 2007

Government Type	2007	2002	1992	1987	1977	1952
Total Governments	89,476	87,576	85,006	83,237	79,913	116,805
Federal	1	1	1	1	1	1
State	50	50	50	50	50	48
<u>Local:</u>						
County	3,033	3,034	3,043	3,042	3,042	3,052
Municipal	19,492	19,429	19,279	19,200	18,862	16,807
Township	16,519	16,504	16,656	16,691	16,822	17,202
School District	13,051	13,506	14,422	14,721	15,174	67,355
Special District	37,381	35,052	31,555	29,532	25,962	12,340

Source: Census of Governments 2002, Vol.1, No.1, and Census of Governments 2007, Government Organization.

based on a county (or counties) having an “urban core” with a population of at least 50,000 plus adjacent areas that have a high degree of social and economic integration with the urban core as determined primarily by commutation patterns. These are, perhaps, reasonable first step approximations to defining what might comprise a metropolitan region. However, there is no such formal jurisdiction.

As of mid-2008 there were 363 metropolitan statistical areas in the US. They varied widely in population size from just under 55,000 in Carson City, Nevada to 19 million in the New York, Northern New Jersey, Long Island MSA. In terms of geographical coverage they ranged from the single county required for

MSA designation to twenty–eight counties in Atlanta, Georgia; many of these 363 MSAs incorporate ten or more counties.

As will be elaborated in the text to follow, one reason that metropolitan/regional government does not appear in Table 1 is that presently there is only one region in the US that approximates it, the Portland, Oregon Metro.

Note: The following section draws from Norris, Phares, and Zimmerman in Phares (2009), Chapter 2, pp. 26-34.

Why is there No Metro Government in the US

Despite what many American scholars, practitioners, and observers believe to be strong theoretical and empirical evidence supporting metropolitan government in the US, for the past fifty years or more there has been virtually no movement in toward this. This is true despite the fact that the academic and professional literatures are rife and robust with arguments for metropolitan-wide (regional) governmental solutions.

The sole example that stands out as approaching metropolitan government is the Metropolitan Service District (or Metro as it is called locally) in the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area. Metro is a multi-functional metropolitan governmental structure (the only one in the US); it serves more than 1.3 million people and encompasses three counties and twenty-five cities. It provides a range of services such as regional transportation planning, waste recycling, green and open space programs, and addresses an array of environmental and growth concerns.

But, even here, Portland falls somewhat short of being a true metropolitan government--a government that is geographically broad enough in scope to encompass **area-wide** problems and issues and a government that provides the a relevant range of local government services within that regional geography. And, even more telling, no other metropolitan area in the US comes even close to achieving the scope of Portland's Metro.

Defining Metropolitan Governance

There are at least two competing definitions of metropolitan governance among US and North American scholars. The first is the more traditional definition and emphasizes governmental structure. It essentially states that metropolitan (regional) governance requires some form of formal metropolitan or area-wide government in order to control and regulate behavior and provide services within the governed territory. Scholars who hold this view argue that without the regulatory and service provision capacity of formal government, hardly anything meaningful will be accomplished to address the issues for which metropolitan governance is said to be needed (e.g., Norris, 2001).

The second definition is the one advanced by a group of scholars who advocate what has come to be known as the New Regionalism. Their position is that metropolitan governance does not require a unique/formal governmental structure but can be achieved through voluntary cooperation among the major players (governmental and nongovernmental, including the private sector) in the metropolitan area (e.g., Savitch and Vogel, 2000). Studies by new regionalist

scholars show that a good deal of cooperation does, indeed, occur among governments and other organizations in US metropolitan areas.

However, what the new regionalists' studies do not show (and this is where they are vulnerable to criticism from scholars who adhere to the more traditional definition of metropolitan governance) is that the cooperation approach functions as effectively as the formal government mode. Here, two limitations to cooperation are quite evident. The first is that local governments simply will not voluntarily surrender their autonomy, especially around "lifestyle" issues (Williams, 1967). In the absence of area-wide authority to overcome local autonomy, not much can be done to address the really thorny area-wide problems or issues. The second is that it takes only a few governments in an area to scuttle any attempt to deal with a metropolitan problem.

The New Regionalism view of metropolitan governance can be briefly outlined as follows:

- a minimum role for government (where possible none),
- where there is government follow a market, public choice type model,
- governance should be through informal arrangements not formal government,
- private sector service provision is preferred,
- the more local and smaller the better.

Factors Affecting the Adoption of Metropolitan Government and Governance in the US

This section will address the principal factors that explain why only one metropolitan area in the US has taken serious strides in the direction of metropolitan governance. These factors are grouped into two categories: political

considerations and fiscal factors. They are taken from Norris, Phares, and Zimmerman (Chapter 2) in Phares (2009), Chapter 2, pp. 26-34.

I. Political Considerations

A Dislike for More Government

In the US, there is an historical and clearly stated dislike for more government despite the fact that the country has 89,476 local political jurisdictions in 2007 (Census of Government, 2007). There is usually associated with metropolitan government a concern often stated as: “*What? another level of government?*” Given the already vast proliferation of local governments, most of which are located in the nation’s 360 plus metropolitan areas, this argument standing by itself makes little, if any, sense. Nevertheless, it is a strong component of the American political culture.

American Local Government Ideology

Americans strongly believe that local government, the government closest to the people, is the best government. This rhetoric is in part an artifact of American history and, in part, an expression of every day experience. At least since Thomas Jefferson, a central theoretical view of American government has been that of the sovereignty and autonomy of the individual in his or her local community (e.g., Syed, 1966.)

At a practical level, Americans live in local communities and experience government and governance there. They receive most of their governmental services, particularly the ones that affect them most significantly (e.g., police and fire protection, public education, land use regulation, etc.) at the local level.

Citizens are also the most able to make their views about governance and service delivery known with the greatest impact at the local level. Indeed, the historic and prevailing local government ideology is an important part of the reason why local citizens oppose nearly anything that would threaten the existence, powers, services, or autonomy of their local governments.

Movement of Power Away from the Existing Local Political Base

There is a prevailing fear that metropolitan government would rearrange the local power base away from the fragmented array of existing local governments and concentrate it in the hands of a new metropolitan government. Many would lose power and some, but likely fewer, would gain. Political control over territory and resources, some or much of which now is very local, would be lost. Such power and control is highly guarded and prized no matter how small the locality. Surrendering it to a metropolitan government is most often not viewed as an acceptable option.

As we indicated above, the prevailing view in the US is that “the more local the better” and even the smaller the better when it comes to government. This view translates further into the belief that, in a smaller community, residents tend to feel more involved in what is happening in their community. They may know the mayor, police chief, and members of the city council personally and feel that they can call on them if an occasion arises. Metropolitan government would potentially lessen or even eliminate this feeling of closeness to “my government” or “my politician.”

Constitutional Status of Local Governments

State constitutions in the US expressly provide for the creation of local governments and for the roles and functions of elected local officials. This grant of constitutional and legal status to local governments is fundamentally important. Not only do state constitutions provide the legal basis for local government, these documents rarely, if ever, provide a comparable basis for the existence of regional governmental structures. In fact, throughout the US, it is far more difficult to establish a regional form of government than to incorporate a new municipality or create a special district.

Both inertia and particular interests grow up around extant local government structures, and they function to favor the status quo over governmental change and reform. Constitutional and legal powers once established create an existence that is largely unchallenged. Moreover, the existence of local governments helps to preclude the establishment of other governmental structures in local governments' regions.

Political Territorial Imperative

The constitutional and legal status of general-purpose local governments gives them unique territory over which to exercise sovereignty and provide services. At best and in nearly all regions, the territories encompassed by regional organizations (e.g., regional planning councils and councils of government) include already existing local governments, and the latter are decidedly not interested in giving up either territory or powers to the former—nor can they be compelled to do so. As such, regional bodies are at a serious

disadvantage when compared with to local governments that inhabit the regional territory. The former have no independent hold on the territory while the latter clearly do.

Additionally, in the animal kingdom, turf is protected at almost any cost. This *territorial imperative* (Ardrey, 1966) can be applied to the realm of local politics as well. Whether mayor of a large city (or a small village) or a council person for a very small city, political turf is coveted and protected. Hence, existing local governments often bitterly oppose any kind of metropolitan structural reform.

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In fact, throughout the US, it is far more difficult to establish a regional form of government than to incorporate a new municipality or create a special district. Both inertia and particular interests grow up around extant local government structures, and they function to favor the status quo over governmental change and reform. Constitutional and legal status, thus, mean that local governments exist in law; are accorded structure, functions, and powers; and, once established, beget an existence that is largely unchallenged.

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Lack of State Leadership or Intervention

While state governments in the US are heavily involved in setting the framework for local government operations—local governments are legal creatures of the state in which they are incorporated—with very few exceptions, states have avoided the political quagmire of governmental reorganization in metropolitan areas. States have more often been reactive to narrow and specific local issues and problems rather than proactive in terms of broader issues and problems that go beyond local boundaries and cut across an entire metropolitan region. This is in contrast to Canada and also Mexico where provinces and the national government have played an active role in encouraging or mandating local restructuring and to the U.K. where the central government has been quite active in local government restructuring and reform.

For the most part, state officials in the US also do not meddle in local affairs without ample reason, and even then very cautiously, because they know that to do so would create an unenviable backlash by local voters.

State Electoral Structure

An important reason why state governments rarely intervene in local governmental affairs has to do with state and local electoral structure. Many state elected officials have come up through the lower elective ranks beginning in local government. They have a healthy respect for local government, and they know that their constituents do as well.

Additionally, state legislators are elected from local districts that encompass all or parts of one or more local governments. This means that local governments and their residents bring problems and issues and express their policy preferences to their state legislators. This reinforces the legislators' knowledge of and respect for local government and local affairs.

Finally, state legislators are fully aware that if they act, especially without good cause, to intervene in the affairs of local governments (particularly to do anything that adversely affects the territory, finances or powers of local governments), the legislators will almost certainly be opposed at the next primary or general election by local elected officials or local citizens who take serious exception to their actions.

Ease of Incorporation and Annexation

Constitutional provisions and/or legislation in many states allow for the incorporation of new cities with relative ease (e.g., Krane, Rigos, and Hill, 2001). The ability of cities to annex surrounding, unincorporated territory varies considerably around the nation. Cities in the northeast and mid-west are largely precluded from annexation while those in the south and west have a greater legal ability to annex. Throughout the country, with some exceptions, it is also relatively easy to form special districts to deal with specific issues or problems (e.g., water, wastewater, refuse, air pollution, public transport, etc.). The current political environment in the US encourages an "incremental" approach to dealing with local concerns. Make your city larger by annexing territory, incorporate a

new city, or form a special district to address a particular problem obviating the need for a more comprehensive approach.

Race, Class, and the Protection of Enclaves

The development of many metropolitan areas has been characterized by enclaves often defined in racial, ethnic, or socio-economic terms. Such a sorting out by race and class has come about in large part through local zoning and land use prerogatives and/or the incorporation of new municipalities. The evidence indicates that, in recent decades, race and class distinctions have become even more extreme between central cities and suburbs (Lowery, 2000).

A metropolitan approach would, almost necessarily, threaten at least the more well-off enclaves. Hence, those who benefit from the present existence of and the future ability to create new enclaves oppose metropolitan government. Additionally, residents of suburban enclaves (almost without regard to the racial or class makeup of these enclaves) would oppose metropolitan efforts to “bail out” central cities.

The Residential Bias of the American People

Nearly every public opinion poll on the subject shows that large majorities of Americans prefer to live either in suburbs, small towns, and/or rural areas (see, for example, “Where we’d live,” 1989). Additionally, and dating back at least to Jefferson, there is a strong anti-city bias abroad in the land. Americans generally profess to dislike large cities. In combination, these attitudes mean that, *ceteris paribus*, Americans not only will move out of and away from cities to suburban and fringe areas, but they will not be kindly disposed to participate in

efforts (especially those involving their tax dollars) to help central cities. This is true regardless of the merits of such campaigns or the dire needs of central cities. Moreover, for at least the past fifty years, the suburbs are precisely where Americans have moved, and when they get there they have shown virtually no interest in either assisting the central cities that they have left or surrendering the autonomy and independence of the suburbs and rural communities into which they have moved.

Lack of Federal Leadership

As we noted above, state governments rarely enter the domain of metropolitan or regional governance. Neither does the federal government. To begin with, unlike the American states and some European nations, the US federal government has no constitutional authority over local governments. More importantly, except for a brief period from about the mid-1960s until the late 1970s, with a brief interval of very limited impact in the 1990s, the US federal government has had little or no policy, presence, or interest in things urban or metropolitan. Indeed, the federal government has provided no significant or sustained leadership to help achieve metropolitan or regional governance at virtually any time.

The Strength of Pro-Sprawl and Pre-Fragmentation Forces

This is a game, in the sense of the term as employed by Long (1958), that pits developers, builders, real estate organizations, suburban residents, and suburban elected officials against academics and “goo-goos” (e.g., the good

government groups like Leagues of Women Voters, chambers of commerce, and editorial writers).

In nearly any contest between pro-sprawl and pro-regionalism forces, the staying power is clearly with the former who have strong and immediate financial interests at stake and who are organized and well-financed. The latter, by contrast, are mostly amateurs and volunteers who may have strong intellectual and emotional reasons for involvement, but who are usually poorly organized and financed. As George Washington Plunkitt said about the municipal reformers of his day, they “were only mornin’ glories—looked lovely in the mornin’ and withered up in a short time, while the regular machines went on flourishin’ forever, like fine oaks” (Riordon, 1994: 57).

The Difficulty of Implementing a Metropolitan Government:

Putting in place a metropolitan government is a difficult and complex undertaking. It involves complex arrangements between and among existing local governments and the layering in of the metropolitan unit. Governmental structure will be altered as will finances, not to mention local politics and a myriad of legal considerations. It can also be hard to maintain.

As we have previously noted, the one example closest to a metropolitan government in the US is found in Portland, Oregon. Planning for this metropolitan arrangement actually began in the late 1950s. Although Metro was initially approved by popular vote in 1978, it required a number of years of incremental movement to achieve its current form which came about via another popular vote in 1992. From planning to implementation it took almost forty years to achieve.

The most recent city-county merger, Louisville/Jefferson County in Kentucky, was put before voters who said “no” three times starting in 1956 until the merger as was finally approved in 2000. Again it took several decades from “start to finish.”

In fact, efforts to achieve some form of metropolitan governance usually begin (and almost always end) with easier, albeit limited and partial, alternatives rather than a true metropolitan government.

Uncertainty

Just as economic markets do not like uncertainty, neither does the political system of a metropolitan area. Discussion of metropolitan government introduces an unacceptable level of uncertainty about what the political countryside will look like in the future, raising questions such as:

- How will the change be implemented?
- How long will it take?
- What is the implementation process going to entail?
- Who will be affected and how?
- Who will be in charge of the changes?

These are questions that engender uncertainty and thus great reluctance to venture very far from the status quo.

Local Government Autonomy

Local government autonomy—or the ability of these governments to exercise their police powers (“the power to regulate private activities in order to protect the public health, safety and morals,” Gray and Eisinger, 1997; 365) broadly within their territories—is sacrosanct in the US. There is absolutely

nothing new about this conclusion; it has been well known for over one hundred years (Danielson, 1976; Teaford, 1979). Indeed, local autonomy is the single most important reason that American local governments are unwilling to enter into arrangements for regional governance.

Arrangements for regional governance that would have “teeth”—that is, would involve local governments ceding authority to regional entities to address certain matters now under their exclusive control (e.g., land development and public education) would directly threaten local autonomy. As Williams (1967) pointed out over three decades ago, although local governments may be willing to cooperate on matters of systems maintenance (essentially house-keeping and infrastructure matters), they are highly unlikely to give up control over lifestyle issues. Nothing much has changed in this regard in the thirty plus years since Williams wrote this.

Although local governments are creatures of their respective states and although state governments have constitutional and legal rights to control local governments, for the most part everyone acts like local governments are autonomous. And local governments and their citizens continually guard their autonomy. Local autonomy becomes especially salient politically when lifestyle issues are involved (e.g., schools, law enforcement, zoning, and other land use powers, etc.). The fear is that in addressing area-wide issues and concerns, metropolitan government will erode local autonomy—and, to be effective it would have to.

II. Economic and Financial Considerations

Protection of Financial Base

The fragmentation of local governments in metropolitan areas produces a disparity among jurisdictions where available resources are not geographically consistent with public service needs. Often the disparity is very large. This leads to a situation of “have” and “have-not” communities. While the *have-nots* might prefer a redistributive metropolitan resource base, they usually lack in political and economic power to move metropolitan forward. The *have* communities generally possess the power and resources to protect their financial bases. As is true in most human pursuits, money matters. It is no different in this context.

Inter-jurisdictional Economic Competition

One thing that a metropolitan government might do well is to promote an entire region for economic development purposes. The notion is to promote the entire region for economic development and worry about specific locations within the region as a second stage in the process. Theoretically everyone benefits if new economic development is attracted to a metropolitan area even if it does not fall within a specific locality.

Resources, structure, and local energy and power would be focused on the region as a whole. In a milieu of fragmented local governments, which characterizes nearly all of metropolitan America, such an approach would tend to lessen inter-jurisdictional competition. It would be much less likely that a municipality within the metropolitan area would be able to promote just itself effectively and, thus, it would lose the associated benefits from its own self-

promotion to those derived from an area wide economic development strategy. In essence self-promotion is perceived as giving a greater advantage to a local community than regional promotion. This advantage would be lost, or lessened, with metropolitan government.

Fear of New Taxes

“No new taxes” is a mantra that has played out in recent years over both the national and state countryside. It also is very much in play at the local level. A fear associated with metropolitan government is that it would entail new taxes, often viewed as significant, to support metropolitan services. Local residents already feel over burdened with the local taxes they are paying. City property taxes which grow with increasing housing prices, sales taxes levied for general and increasingly for specific purposes, and property taxes associated with schools and special districts all contribute to this view.

Even with the suggestion that metropolitan government would be “revenue neutral” in keeping with a no new taxes mantra often voiced in a metropolitan reform context there would still be a redistribution of resources across the area, perhaps considerable. Some residents would lose and some would gain. Overriding concerns are: who gains, who loses, and how much is gained or lost?

How to Move Toward Regional Government/Governance

The process of moving from the present status quo for government structure in the US has proven to be very difficult, or one might even say virtually impossible. Despite compelling arguments with a variety of rationales for regional government spelled out over the past fifty years or longer, none truly exists.

Metro Portland is the sole exception of regional government. However, it still lacks in complete geographical coverage which is three out of eight counties in the MSA. Also, while it encompasses many regional functions it does not cover all that could legitimately be viewed as regional.

Walker (1987) has provided an outline of types of movement toward regional governance. It is quite exhaustive in its specification and has categories that range from “easiest” to “middling” to “hardest.” It is shown in Table 2.

As might be anticipated the *easiest* types are the ones that have been most widely adopted since they require only a marginal shift from an existing status quo situation. They represent many of the components inherent to a new regionalism approach to metropolitan governance—not through a formal regional government structure but through informal arrangements. Some are:

- informal cooperation,
- inter-local service agreements,
- private contracting,
- extra-territorial powers,
- regional councils/councils of government,
- joint powers agreements,
- cooperative purchasing agreements.

The easiest category is characterized by informal arrangements and agreements that are narrow both in geographical and functional scope.

The *middling* category is more troublesome in terms of adoption but has been manifest in the use of special districts and to a lesser extent annexations. As was shown in Table 1 special districts have increased by 303% between 1952 and 2007 from 12,340 to 37,381.

Table 2

Regional Governance Approaches: Walker’s Classification

Approach	Summary description
<i>Easiest</i>	
Informal cooperation	Collaborative and reciprocal actions between two local governments
Inter-local Service Agreements	Voluntary but formal agreements between two or more local governments
Joint Powers Agreements	Agreements between two or more local governments for joint planning, financing, and delivery of a service
Extra-territorial Powers	Allows a city to exercise some regulatory authority outside of its boundary in rapidly developing unincorporated areas
Regional Councils/Councils of Government	Local councils that rely mostly on voluntary efforts and have moved to regional agenda-definer and conflict-resolver roles
Federally Encouraged Single-Purpose Regional Bodies	Single-purpose regional bodies created when tied to federal funds
State Planning and Development Districts	Established by states in the 1960s and early 1970s to bring order to chaotic creation of federal special purpose regional programs
Contracting (private)	Service contracts with private providers.
<i>Middling</i>	
Local Special Districts	Provides a single service or multiple related services on a multi-jurisdictional basis
Transfers of Functions	Shifting of responsibility for provision of a service from one jurisdiction to another
Annexation	Bringing an unincorporated area into an incorporated jurisdiction
Regional Special Districts and Authorities	Region wide districts for providing a service, for example, mass transit or sewage disposal A regional district to provide multiple functions
Metro Multipurpose District Reformed Urban County	Establishment of a charter county
<i>Hardest</i>	
One-Tier Consolidation	Consolidation of city and county
Two-Tier Restructuring	Division of functions between local and regional
Three-Tier Restructuring	Agencies at multiple levels of government that absorb, consolidate, or restructure new and/or existing roles and responsibilities

Source: Adapted from Walker (1987).

The type of special districts that have been authorized varies widely but they all share a common distinction, they deal with a single function. Sometimes they cover multiple counties in a MSA but more often they are limited to a single county area. The types of special districts in existence for 2002 are shown in Table 3 (Census of Governments, *Government Organization 2002*, pp. 13–15).

As is obvious from a perusal of this list most of these functions are well suited for a regional organization covering two or more counties. However, in 2002 most of the 35,052 special districts in existence were contained within a single county. Only 4,458 (13%) were “located within part or all of two or more county areas.” In addition, only 3,175 or 9 percent, provided more than a single function (Census of Governments, *Governmental Organization 2002*, pp. 13-16).

Walker’s *hardest* category is manifest in the US only as one–tier consolidation of city and county. With the exception of Metro Portland the two and three tier consolidation category is a void. Even the presence of a one–tier consolidation approach is limited. Table 4 lists the consolidations that have occurred since 1805, some 204 years. Despite hundreds of referendum proposals, only a paltry thirty–four have been enacted.

Table 3		
Types of Special Districts in the US		Number (2002)
<i>Single Function Districts</i>	31,877	
education (not a school district)		518
libraries		1,580
hospitals		711
health		753
welfare		57
highways		743
air transportation		510
other transportation		205
drainage and flood control		3,247
soil and water conservation		2,506
other natural resource		1,226
parks and recreation		1,287
housing and community development		3,399
sewerage		2,004
solid waste management		455
water supply		3,405
other utilities		1,161
fire protection		5,725
cemeteries		1,666
industrial development		234
other single function		1,161
<i>Multi-Function Districts</i>	3,175	
natural resources and water supply		102
sewerage and water supply		1,446
other multi-function		1,627
Total Special Districts as of 2002		35,052

Source: Census of Governments (2002), *Government Organization*, pp. 13–15.

Table 4
Successful City-County Consolidations

Year Approved	Local Jurisdictions Involved, State	Means Used
1805	New Orleans, New Orleans Co., LA	LA
1821	Boston, Suffolk Co., MA	LA
1821	Nantucket Town, Nantucket Co., MA	LA
1854	Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., PA	LA
1856	San Francisco, San Francisco CO., CA	LA
1874	New York, New York Co., NY	LA
1898	New York, Brooklyn, Bronx, Staten Island, Queens	LA
1904	Denver, Denver Co., CO	LA
1907	Honolulu, Honolulu Co., HI	LA
1947	Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA	REF
1952	Hampton, Elizabeth City Co., VA	REF
1958	Newport News, Warwick Co., VA	REF
1962	Nashville, Davidson Co., TN	REF
1962	Virginia Beach, Princess Ann Co., VA	REF
1962	South Norfolk, Norfolk Co., VA	REF
1967	Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL	REF
1969	Carson City, Ormsby Co., NV	REF
1969	Indianapolis, Marion Co., IN	LA
1969	Juneau, Greater Juneau Borough, AK	REF
1970	Columbus, Muskeg Co., CA	REF
1971	Holland/Whaleville Towns, Nansemond Co., VA	REF
1971	Sitka, Greater Sitka Borough, AK	REF
1972	Suffolk, Nansemond Co., VA *	REF
1974	Lexington, Fayette Co., KY	REF
1975	Anchorage, Greater Anchorage Area Borough, AK	REF
1977	Anaconda, Deer Lodge Co., MT	REF
1977	Butte, Silver Bow Co., MT	REF
1984	Houma, Terrebonne Parish, LA	REF
1990	Athens, Clark Co., GA	REF
1992	Lafayette, Lafayette Parish, LA	REF
1995	Augusta, Richmond Co., GA	REF
1997	Kansas City, Wyandotte Co., KS	REF
1999	Louisville, Jefferson Co., KY	REF
2000	Hartsville, Trousdale Co., TN	Not reported

Sources: Wallis, A.D. (1994); Leland and Thurmaier (2005); National Association of Counties, <http://www.naco.org>. LA= legislative action REF= referendum.

* Suffolk initially was a county, but became a municipality prior to consolidation.

Spanning Governance Reform: the St. Louis Metro Area

While there are far too many metro areas in the US to spell out what has been done to further metro governance across all of them use of an example helps to illustrate the points spelled out above. To this end examination of the St. Louis metro area depicts all types of governance reforms from formal government structure to city/county consolidation to special districts to informal agreements and arrangements.

Beginning with Walker's "hardest" category, in terms of formal government structure changes several attempts have been made to reform government in the St. Louis area. Going back to 1876 they involve the following based proposals

NOTE: The following sections draw from E.T. Jones and D. Phares in Phares (2009), Chapter 5, pp. 79-107.

Formal Governance Proposals

Separation of the City from the County: The "Great Divorce"

By 1876 St. Louis City was a large city in a rural county that had very sparse population and limited commercial activity and tax base. This produced pressure for the city to separate itself from the county and avoid the financial burden of supporting the county. The relationship between these governments had been characterized by "uninterrupted controversy" since the early 1860s (Cassella, 1959, p. 87).

During the constitutional convention in 1875 the city-county relationship was at the forefront. It adopted a provision that authorized separation which was approved in 1875. Using the new constitution, a specific mandate was prepared to

plan for the separation for voter approval. It was passed in 1876. The city was “emancipated” and increased in size from about eighteen to sixty-one square miles, an area deemed to be more than adequate for future growth.

One of the problems with the new constitution was that it contained no provision for any subsequent adjustment of city-county borders. By the early 1900s it was obvious that the city and county were becoming a unified urban area, with interrelated problems, but there was no way to deal with the regional issues due to the formal separation.

It is from this historical setting that proposals emerged to deal with the shortsightedness of the “great divorce.” Ironically, these later planning proposals for regional governance emerged out of the 1876 plan that was its antithesis.

Consolidation under City Government: 1926

Following the city-county separation it became more obvious that this might well have been a mistake and some type of merger might be appropriate. To correct this deficiency, deliberations began in 1922 to change the constitution. An amendment passed easily in November 1924 in the city, county, and statewide. It had three options:

- The city would extend its limits to include the entire county,
- The county would extend its limits to include the city, which could then extend its limits under existing law, and
- The city could annex part of the county under the exclusive jurisdiction of the city.

In 1926, a plan was introduced (Board of Freeholders, 1926; Jones, 2000) that:

- made the city charter the governing document for the new area,
- eliminated all county offices and placed them under city control,
- transferred all county property to the city,

- eliminated all municipalities in the county,
- put the city police department in control of the entire new area, and
- abolished all county school districts putting them under city school board control.

De facto it was reentry or annexation but dominated and controlled by the city. It passed overwhelmingly in the city (by 87 percent) but failed in the county (by 67 percent).

A Metropolitan Federation: 1930

After a cooling down period following the 1926 plan, interest was reignited in a cooperative endeavor between the city and county. It was proposed to amend the Missouri Constitution to form an overarching metropolitan government to be called "Greater St. Louis." A statewide vote was proposed and put on the ballot in 1930. However, the concerns from the 1926 proposal remained and it was defeated statewide..

The Metropolitan Sewer District: 1954

Beginning in the mid-1800s with a serious cholera epidemic, it became obvious by the early 1950s that treatment of sewage in the county was having a serious impact on the city. The county was a myriad of treatment facilities including fifteen municipal systems, twenty-four sewer districts, seventy-five subdivision systems, and thousands of septic tanks (Jones, 2000, p. 105).

In this context the Bi-State Development Agency conducted an engineering study of sewer needs in the county. The findings indicated the following (Metropolitan St. Louis Survey, 1957a, p. 68):

- there was a serious sewer problem in both the city and county,
- the health hazards were area-wide,

- the sewer problems could not be handled separately since the urbanized area of the county drained through into the city, and
- piecemeal efforts failed because they covered less than an entire watershed and had inadequate resources to address the issue.

The solution was to establish a special purpose district, the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District (MSD), which would include the city and the urbanized portion of the county. Reception at the polls was strongly positive (Jones, 2000, p. 107). The MSD was established in 1954. Later, in 1977, most of the remaining parts of the county were added to the MSD by an overwhelming positive vote.

A Metropolitan Transit District: 1955

In 1949, the Bi-State Development Agency was established to deal with transportation issues in the bi-state region. Bi-State was as Jones (2000, p. 97) put it a “governmental wimp.” It had empowerment to deal with area transportation issues but no authority to tax or to do much else except “make plans.” It could not set or implement policies.

In 1952, the question of who should own and operate public transit became an issue for the region. More than fifteen companies provided transit services. Out of this chaotic environment came a proposal for another Board of Freeholders (Metropolitan St. Louis Transit District, 1955) to deal with current and emerging transportation problems. A board was appointed in the spring of 1953 but was plagued by a lack of interest and attention.

This board decided to delay the issue of ownership of transit facilities and focus on control over the power to set fares. Voter turnout was extremely light, 10 percent of city voters and 8 percent county. It was defeated by only 3,099 votes in the city and

2,110 in the county (*St. Louis Globe Democrat*, January 26, 1955, p. 1; Jones, 2000, pp. 96–99).

A Metropolitan St. Louis District: 1959

Over the more than three decades since the previous comprehensive look at the St. Louis area's governmental structure in 1926, the nation had gone through the Great Depression and World War II. Attention now shifted back to the region and its existing and emerging problems. This began with a large-scale study that examined the needs and problems of the St. Louis region. The Metropolitan St. Louis Survey project issued two reports (1957a, 1957b), which discussed metropolitan issues in great depth.

Two conflicting proposals were considered. The first was a metropolitan district that would deal with seven major functional areas. The second was a merger of the city and county into an entity called the "municipal county." The vote from the board on the plan was highly disputed but finally emerged as ten for the district and nine for the municipal merger (later called the Borough Plan).

The proposed plan was called the "Greater St. Louis City-County District." Specified for this district was the following set of functions (Metropolitan Board of Freeholders, 1959, pp. i–ii):

- establish and maintain a system of arterial roads, expressways, and major streets;
- regulate mass transit including fares, routing and schedules, traffic lanes, and other means of encouraging use of such facilities;
- take over the Metropolitan Sewer District established in 1954;
- organize civil defense under one central administration;
- encourage establishment of industrial locations to attract new business;
- engage in comprehensive area-wide planning; and
- coordinate a centralized police communication and reporting system.

In addition the plan could be amended to include “additional services” (not defined in the plan) when approved by a majority of voters in both areas. The plan was put on the ballot on November 3, 1959, and lost by large margins. The closeness of the split on the board—ten in favor of the district and nine for merger—led quickly to another proposal.

The Borough Plan: 1962

Out of the consternation surrounding the 1959 District plan, movement began immediately to draft a proposal to consolidate the city and county. It was essentially the same proposal put forth by the minority in the 1959 District proposal. However, it was decided to use a constitutional amendment process and would require statewide voter approval.

The new governmental entity was to be known as the Municipal County of St. Louis and would consolidate all governmental entities in both the city and county fulfilling the dual role of city and county. It would include cities, towns, villages, fire protection districts, the Metropolitan Sewer District, all other sewer districts, public water supply districts, and all other municipal corporations. School districts, however, were excluded.

The Municipal County would consist of twenty-two boroughs. Eight would be within the city, seven within the county, and the remaining seven would straddle the city-county border. The purpose here was to give the assurance that the city was not just swallowing up the county.

This plan was to become even more heated than the District plan proposed in 1959. Opposition emerged from all sides and the Borough Plan

constitutional amendment was heavily defeated. The results were viewed as a strong statement that consolidation (read merger) was not “the way” to solve city-county problems (Sengstock et al., 1964).

Major Countywide Reform: 1987

Section 30(a) of the state constitution designates five types of reform that could be considered. The first three relate to reentry or merger between St. Louis City and St. Louis County. The fourth addresses the formation of an area-wide district(s) and was put in place in 1945. The fifth option was added to the constitution by a statewide referendum in 1966. It is very broad in scope and allows the board: “to formulate and adopt *any other* plan for the partial or complete government of all or any part of the city and the county” (emphasis added).

Under the purview of the fifth option, a new Board of Freeholders was set up to delve into the myriad issues pertaining to local government organization within St. Louis County. While this option provides constitutional authority to propose the restructuring of any and all local governments, including school districts and special districts, the board made a conscious decision to focus only on county and municipal issues. Such a focus also mandated an examination of fire-EMS services because twenty of the forty-three county providers of fire protection and EMS were municipal departments.

The board’s focus on municipal and county government organization and finance derived directly from the adverse fiscal environment that had been evolving for decades. A context for its work was provided by several studies, one of which posed an intriguing question for the title of its final report, *Too Many Governments?*

(Confluence St. Louis, 1987). After long and careful deliberation, this board developed several premises that guided its deliberations and the formulation of its plan.

First, the nearly 400,000 residents of unincorporated portions of the county generally were being inadequately served by the county's provision of municipal services. The complete incorporation of the county was proposed as a solution to this problem.

Second and related, it was proposed that county government no longer provide any municipal services; this responsibility would vest with newly created cities. This removed a situation where the county was responsible for providing both municipal and county services to the same area but where varying provision levels of the municipal-type services were often the case (Board of Freeholders, 1988b, pp. A1-A2).

Third, a structure was proposed within which all residents of the county would have access to adequate, basic municipal and fire-EMS services. During lengthy deliberations, it was determined that the highly fragmented local government structure and associated large revenue base disparities produced an environment in which adequate public services were not available to all county residents.

Fourth, it was obvious that adequate financial resources must be made available to support municipal, county, and fire-EMS services. Documented vast differences in available public resources and service levels mandated a plan that would realign existing resources and also allow for the provision of additional resources as necessary.

Fifth, an “end state” plan with clearly defined municipal and fire-EMS boundaries was specified rather than adopting a “process” or more step-by-step, incremental approach. The board’s standing was to provide as much certainty as possible that the new governmental structure would incorporate the entire county and provide adequate resources to finance the reformulated county government, the proposed new cities, and the new fire-EMS districts. The outcome was thirty-seven new municipalities and four fire-EMS districts covering the entire county. The proposed new cities ranged in population from 6,400 to 78,200 with only five having less than 10,000 residents; the average population was about 27,000.

The board’s plan was to incorporate the entire county into the new cities. Most of the proposed new cities were derived using an existing city (or cities) as a core; six new cities, however, were formed primarily from then large unincorporated portions of the county.

As a pivotal component, the fiscal plan realigned municipal finances so that each of the new cities would have a revenue base that would allow it to provide adequate public services. The same procedure was followed for the reformulated county government that would now have the responsibility for providing only county-type service following the clear division of functional service responsibility discussed above (Board of Freeholders, 1988b, pp. A1–A2).

Several objectives were accomplished by this plan. All municipal services would be provided by a city not by the county. The fiscal portion of the plan would balance resources with needs, and provisions for future revenue growth potential would be enhanced through reliance on a sales and income tax base rather than on

property. Each city government and the county government would be fiscally enabled to deliver adequate basic services to its residents. In addition, adequate fire-EMS protection would now be available throughout the county.

Due to long and complex legal machinations, that eventually reached the U.S. Supreme Court, the plan was declared unconstitutional and never reached the ballot box.

The Board of Electors Plan: 1990

Following the 1987 plan a new proposal was considered. During deliberations a wide range of plans and ideas emanating from past proposals, including “. . . the formation of a single county government structure for the city and county” (Board of Electors, 1991, p. 2). However, two rather weak and narrow proposals finally emerged: (1) establish a Metropolitan Economic Development Commission and (2) create a Metropolitan Park Commission. The Metropolitan Economic Development Commission would “. . . finance programs which will create, attract, retain, expand, develop, improve and enhance employment opportunities within the city and county” (*ibid.*, pp. 5–6).

The Metropolitan Park Commission would “. . . govern, administer, repair, maintain, conserve, sustain, protect and improve any and all Commission Parks” (*ibid.*, p. 24). De facto, only the 1,300-acre Forest Park in the city would be under its purview unless expanded authority and funding were approved by voters. The final proposal was placed on the ballot in 1992 and was defeated.

Incremental Governance Changes

In addition to the formal governmental proposals summarized above, the St. Louis area has considered and adopted numerous informal arrangements as

well as forming new special districts. These are summarized in Table 5. They cover a wide array of functions and in many instances several counties. The formal governments are all special districts and the balance of the governance mechanisms are non-governmental or informal in nature.

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Table 5
Multi-County Governance in the St. Louis Area: 1954– Present

Sanitary Waste/Storm Water/Solid Waste

Metropolitan Sewer District (City of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (1954)
St. Louis-Jefferson Solid Waste Management District (city of St. Louis, St. Louis County, Jefferson County, St. Charles County) (1991)

Education

St. Louis Community College District (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (1961)
Southwestern Illinois College (Madison County and St. Clair County) (1985)
Cooperating School Districts (most counties) (1964)

Cultural Institutions and the Arts

Zoo-Museum District: Zoo, Art Museum, Science Center (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (1971)
Zoo-Museum District: Missouri Botanical Garden (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (1983)
Zoo-Museum District: Missouri History Museum (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (1987)
Regional Arts Commission (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (1984)

Public Safety

Major Case Squad (ten counties) (1965)
Regional Justice Information System (eight counties) (1975)

Transportation

Bi-State Development Agency/Metro (city of St. Louis, St. Louis County, St. Clair County) (1950 then expanded in the 1960's)
Lambert International Airport (city of St. Louis, St. Louis County, St. Charles County) (originally City of St. Louis, then representation expanded in the 1980's and 1990's)
East West Gateway Council of Governments (eight counties) (1965)
Metropolitan Taxi Commission (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (2003)

Tourism and Sports Venues

Convention and Visitors Commission (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (1984)
Edward D Jones Dome (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (1990)
Busch Stadium III (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (2006)

Parks and Open Space

Great Rivers Greenway (city of St. Louis, St. Louis County, St. Charles County) (2000)
Metro East Park and Recreation District (Madison County and St. Clair County) (2000)

Table 5.1 (Continued)
Multi-County Governance in the St. Louis Area: 1954–Present

Health Care for the Indigent

Regional Medical Center (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (1985-1997)

St. Louis ConnectCare (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (1997)

Regional Health Commission (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (2001)

Economic Development

St. Louis Enterprise Centers (city of St. Louis and St. Louis County) (1991)

Greater St. Louis Economic Development Council (five counties) (1994)

Greater St. Louis Regional Empowerment Zone (city of St. Louis, St. Louis County, St. Clair County) (1998)

Note: The items **highlighted in bold** are formal special districts. The others are various types of agreements or cooperation among the indicated counties.

Source: Don Phares (ed.).(2009).*Governing Metropolitan Regions in the 21st Century*, Jones and Phares, Chapter 5, pp. 92-93.

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