

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS
Major Metro Achievement Award Nomination for COG's Leadership in Reforming
how the D.C. Region's Transit System is Governed**

**Submitted by
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The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) has demonstrated the value of regional cooperation and public-private partnership through its key role in reforming how the D.C. region's transit system is governed, and its leadership of this effort makes COG an outstanding candidate for the NARC Major Metro Achievement Award.

Metro is one of the Washington D.C. region's most valuable assets. It provides 1.2 million daily transit trips, reduces traffic congestion, improves air quality, attracts businesses and development around its stations, strengthens government tax bases, serves large numbers of visitors to the nation's capital, and fulfills a key role in homeland security evacuation plans.

However, even as the region's stake in Metro's success has grown, the system's performance has declined in recent years, experiencing fatal accidents, management instability, overcrowded trains and buses, broken escalators, and unsatisfactory service reliability. A growing number of area leaders expressed concern that significant shortcomings in the governance structure at the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority were contributing to Metro's serious decline.

In response to these concerns and because the region's success is so closely tied to Metro's performance, COG partnered with the Greater Washington Board of Trade (BOT) to create a Joint WMATA Governance Review Task Force to recommend ways to improve how Metro is governed. The Task Force's membership demonstrated a strong public-private partnership by bringing together an esteemed group of 18 current and former elected officials, government managers, and business leaders.

Beginning its work in June 2010, it met 16 times over five months and received input from dozens of officials, stakeholders, and experts, including current and former Metro board members and general managers. The Task Force also received public comment, reviewed scholarly articles and studies, and examined governance arrangements for Metro and other transit and multi-state public sector organizations. COG kept the group's tight timeline on track by providing staff support on research, writing, public outreach, and media relations.

In November 2010, the Task Force released its report, *Moving Metro Forward*, during a press conference at COG. The Task Force found that the governance structure that may have been appropriate for Metro to build a new transit system in the 1960s is not appropriate to operate today's mature system. It also found that the current structure does not promote accountability or regional cohesion and, in a number of areas, Metro is out of step with best practices employed by other transit agencies.

The Task Force report recommended specific changes to improve delineation of responsibilities at Metro, the composition of the Metro Board, the role of the Board Chair, and decision-making by the Board. It proposed that these changes be carried out by the different groups involved in Metro's complex governance structure—the Signatories of Metro's Compact (the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia), its Appointing Authorities, and Board.

The report generated a tremendous amount of media coverage. Combined with these news stories and editorials, the report sparked a region-wide conversation about improving how Metro is governed. COG's executive director David Robertson joined Task Force members at a number of outreach meetings throughout the D.C. region to discuss the report's findings and recommendations.

Less than a week after the report's release, Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell, Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley, and D.C. Mayor-elect Vincent Gray issued a joint statement that they were "committed to working together to advance the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations."

In January 2011, after a review of the Task Force report as well as a subsequent governance report by Metro's Riders Advisory Council, the three state Departments of Transportation released a plan and schedule for reforming governance at Metro. To help complete this reform effort, the states have requested support from COG to do additional research on several transit governance topics.

In addition to encouraging a swift and strong response at the state level, several Task Force recommendations were also quickly enacted by Metro's Board. For example, the Metro Board now defines the General Manager as a Chief Executive Officer and says it will give the CEO clear authority to manage the system. The Board also agreed to select a regionally focused Chair and end the custom of annually rotating the position, which the Task Force said resulted in a diminished role for the person who should be the Board's leader. In addition, the Board agreed with the Task Force to establish a committee to oversee the necessary changes to the authority's governance.

Throughout 2011, COG will continue to engage area leaders and stakeholders on the Task Force's findings and recommendations, track the progress of the reform effort, and continue to provide assistance as needed to the states, Appointing Authorities, Metro Board, and others involved in the governance reform effort.

The governance issue wasn't the first time COG intervened at a critical moment for the transit system. A major COG study in the 1970s concluded that the system's original 103-mile rail plan would be a sound, regional investment when some wanted to curtail Metro's construction. In 2005, COG partnered with BOT to create an expert panel on Metro's funding needs, which helped lead to a 10 year, \$3 billion federal-state agreement.

Despite this history with Metro, governance was a complicated political issue in the tri-state D.C. region. While some leaders and stakeholders embraced the Task Force's

recommendations, others raised concerns or suggested alternative approaches. The dialogue and focus on a critical regional issue is exactly what COG hoped to generate when it took this issue on.

At its 2010 annual meeting, several of COG's leaders said they were pleased that once again COG was the place area leaders turned to on a tough issue. And because of COG's strong leadership on the Metro governance effort, its members, stakeholders, and the public will continue to trust COG when other critical regional issues need to be addressed in the future.

Supporting Documents Attached:

- *Moving Metro Forward: Report of the Joint WMATA Governance Review Task Force*
- *Transforming Governance of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority: Implementation Plan and Schedule for WMATA Governance Reform*
- *Washington Post Editorial: A turning point for Metro to revamp its board structure*
- Full list of media on COG-BOT Task Force