

Governing Greater Boston

The Politics and Policy of Place

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2. *Thinking Like a Region: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*

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ON A CLASSIC CLEAR AND COOL NEW ENGLAND SUMMER weekend in June of 2001, more than 70 architects, planners, developers, government officials, and community advocates from Greater Boston spent 12 hours conferring and debating about possible solutions to problems of economic growth. Working in small groups, gathering around a wall of newsprint seven feet by 15 feet in size, prodded by “facilitators,” these professionals and activists sought nothing less than to define a new strategy of regionalism for one of the oldest metropolitan areas in the United States.

This “Future Search” event was the culmination of a year-long series of workshops and conferences sponsored by the Boston Society of Architects. The BSA’s Civic Initiative for a Livable New England attracted representatives from scores of communities and organizations across the metropolitan area. The event at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government was the ultimate brainstorming session. The participants explored the challenges of affordable housing, transportation, development, the environment, education, and taxes. Some argued for the creation of a new metropolitan government that could take a comprehensive approach to confront the ills of sprawl, like traffic congestion, homogenization of community, loss of farmland. Others argued that the Boston area already had the tools it needed to address sprawl, primarily at the state level of government but also in the cities and towns where development issues are generally settled.

Some argued that the production of new affordable housing could never be realized unless every city and town was induced to produce its share of low-cost housing for the whole region. Others focused on how the “American Dilemma” of race fragmented the Boston area; racial and class exclusiveness, these participants said, was the root cause of middle-class abandonment of urban school districts and the development of newer suburban communities beyond Route 128 toward Interstate 495. Still other participants said

property tax-sharing is essential to remove the tendency of cities and towns to seek new tax revenues through commercial development.

The most prominent idea of the Future Search was mixed-use, transit-oriented development. The ideal of the classic “urban village”—the self-sustaining clusters of a variety of businesses, civic spaces, and housing, built around transit stations—was extolled for its promise of reducing waste in the use of land and natural resources, creating more units of affordable housing, and providing more shopping and work options for residents. But just how to define urban villages, and what kinds of political strategies and policy tools might help develop them across the region, provoked confusion and debate. Some critics feared that mixed-use development might mean imposing commercial districts in long-time residential areas—which undoubtedly would create a backlash among those bedroom communities. Other critics challenged the urban village advocates to show vividly what such development would look like. Greater Boston’s classic villages—Central Square and Harvard Square in Cambridge, Davis Square in Somerville, Brookline Village and Coolidge Corner in Brookline—might require new strategies to create in the 21st century. It is one thing to maintain and improve old-style villages, quite another to create them anew.

In the final stage of the Future Search, participants discussed how to implement the recommendations that had been advanced at the gathering. Committees were formed to explore specific approaches to issues like transportation, housing, and the environment. The idea of regionalism was central to the entire discussion, as participants called for addressing each major issue on a metropolitan basis. Participants talked about regionalism as both a state of mind and a structure for dealing with growth-related problems.

In recent years, regionalism has been a more prominent part of the political and policy dialogue of Greater Boston. As concerns about sprawl increase, some Bostonians think it may be time to learn from the regional “smart growth” initiatives in Portland, Seattle, Salt Lake City, Silicon Valley, and other metropolitan areas. The most noteworthy example of growth management in New England is the Cape Cod Commission, a regional planning agency with the authority to regulate large development projects. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), a state chartered agency charged with developing regional approaches to policy but which enjoys little real power, is updating its “MetroPlan” to create a guide for regional development. Perhaps most important, after passage of a special taxing powers for localities called the Community Preservation Act, cities and towns across Massachusetts are debating whether to pass new surcharges on property taxes to build affordable housing, preserve open space, or fund historic preservation.

Even with housing, an issue where municipalities traditionally protect their prerogatives, several advocates and academics have called for a regional strategy. The Catholic Archdiocese of Boston, building on a study by Northeastern University's Center for Urban and Regional Policy, has advocated building 35,000 affordable units over and above current construction rates in Greater Boston in the next five years. The Citizens Housing and Planning Association has been working with advocates and academics to forge a regional coalition to implement a regional affordable housing strategy and to confront the segregation of poor people in older urban communities.

Regionalism was the subject of a state commission authorized in 1996. As Governor William F. Weld was proposing the abolition of counties, the state legislature established a Regionalization Commission to explore strategies for cities and towns to collaborate on delivering services and undertaking large-scale projects. Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino, who had originally called for the commission, served as chair and funded half of its expenses. The study covered the 122 communities of Suffolk, Norfolk, Middlesex, and Essex Counties. The main recommendations of the commission's 1997 report included establishing an economic development forum to develop a regional development strategy, creating new means of sharing responsibility for some municipal services, and considering creation of a council of governments (COG) to provide ongoing administration for shared services.

Sharing municipal services was considered a good first step for regionalism because it was voluntary and non-controversial. A survey included in the report discovered that Greater Boston voters disliked the concepts of "regionalization" or "regional government," but looked favorably on "cooperative action," especially if it saves money. The MAPC developed strategies for cooperative purchasing and municipal employee training, but other recommendations were forgotten.

The pressing regional issues of land use regulation, affordable housing, and infrastructure funding are much more complex and controversial. The Regionalization Commission did not touch upon these issues. Regional efforts to grapple with them have been fragmented and sporadic.

Boston's Development as a Region

Throughout history, Greater Boston's size and complexity have made it difficult to create a regional strategy for addressing economic growth, transportation and other infrastructure needs, and social problems like housing and social services.

Contemporary Greater Boston comprises most of Eastern Massachusetts, except Cape Cod, the Islands, and the area of New Bedford

and Fall River. Boston has been the political, economic, and cultural center for Eastern Massachusetts since its founding as the Puritan “city upon a hill” on September 7, 1630. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Puritan congregations fanned out from Boston to establish new communities across the region. At the time of the Revolution, Eastern Massachusetts towns were connected by their Committees of Correspondence and the Minutemen militias. Though not suburbs in the contemporary sense of the word, Concord, Braintree, Wayland and other communities outside the City of Boston were tied to the political, economic, and social life that emanated from Boston. As the historian David Hackett Fisher has noted, the thickness of social networks from Boston to Lexington and Concord made Paul Revere’s famous ride successful.¹

The communities surrounding Boston first developed suburban characteristics in the 1820s, as businesses and farms in Cambridge, Somerville, and Watertown became virtual extensions of the Boston market. Commuting by railroad increased dramatically between 1845 and 1860, when the numbers of Boston workers living outside the city grew from a few hundred to 10,000.² During the same years, factory towns funded by Boston banks and other sources of capital appeared along the waterways of Eastern Massachusetts, particularly the Merrimac River and the Charles River.

Between the Civil War and the turn of the nineteenth century, railroads and streetcars enabled Boston’s urbanized area to expand into approximately forty communities surrounding the core city. Affluent Yankee businessmen and professionals retreated to such suburbs as West Roxbury, Brookline, Newton, Belmont, and Wellesley to escape the immigrants, industrialism, and pollution of the teeming city. The physical legacies of this era are the suburban town centers—in today’s argot, urban villages—built around railroad stations and the nearby clusters of Victorian houses. Large-scale industry also fled Boston in search of more space and cheaper real estate in Lynn, Somerville, Chelsea, and Cambridge. Several dozen radial railroad and streetcar lines connected the downtown area of Boston with surrounding communities. During this era, Boston was truly the “hub” of a burgeoning metropolitan area—if not the hub of the solar system, as Oliver Wendell Holmes would state ironically.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sub-regions developed on the North Shore and South Shore, with resort towns developing in Cohasset, Nantasket, Nahant, and Manchester-by-the-Sea (and eventually becoming commuting suburbs). A swath of affluent residential suburbs appeared in the western communities, including rural-style enclaves such as Weston and Lincoln. A pocket of middle- and working-class suburbs

developed to include Medford, Malden, Melrose, Stoneham, Wakefield, and Winchester. Between 1890 and 1940, the fastest growing area of metropolitan Boston consisted of the communities that lie from four and nine miles outside of downtown Boston. Nevertheless, Boston remained the focus of the region, politically and economically.

Post-World War II highways transformed the region, gradually making the central city less important. The construction of Route 128, a circumferential road ten miles from downtown, spurred the change, as the most innovative technology businesses moved to the suburban periphery during the 1950s. Postwar suburbs like Norwood, Westwood, Wilmington, and Reading boomed with the completion of Route 128. Framingham and Burlington became “edge cities.” Between 1950 and 2000 Framingham’s population grew from 28,086 to 64,359 and Burlington’s grew from 3,250 to 23,920.

By the 1980s, development leapfrogged another fifteen miles to the Interstate 495 corridor, where the region’s fastest growth is currently taking place. During the 1990s, the population of Boxborough grew by 45.6 percent, Hopkinton grew 45.2 percent, Franklin 33.8 percent, Southborough 32.5 percent, Mendon 31.8 percent, and Westborough 27.3 percent. The Massachusetts Turnpike, Interstates 95 and 93, Route 3, and other highways have filled out a transportation network that serves an increasingly decentralized Greater Boston region. Though it remains a vital and compelling city, Boston itself plays a less important role in the region, as economic and cultural activity has become spread widely across all of Eastern Massachusetts. The population of the City of Boston in 2000 was 589,141, while the population of the 1999 Boston-Worcester-Lawrence-Lowell-Brockton Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA) in Eastern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire was 5,901,589.

Greater Boston has not grown by simply spreading out from the core, as has been the case in the Sunbelt. What distinguishes Boston from other regions is that towns with established identities, which cannot easily be subsumed by larger entities, surround the central city. During the nineteenth century, canals, turnpikes, and railroads tied the communities more closely together, with urbanization occurring mainly in the vicinity of the railroad stations. During the auto age, development has appeared in the open areas between town centers and along highways, creating the classic car-oriented sprawl. As the communities have grown more metropolitan, even urban in character, they have maintained their strong traditions as individual towns and resisted regional approaches to economic growth and development. In contrast, the Sunbelt pattern of growth spreading out from the core has made easier the annexation of outlying areas and the imposition of county or metropolitan government.

U.S. Census Bureau data show how the metropolitan area grew in the twentieth century. In 1910, the Boston Metropolitan District had 1.97 million people living in 37 municipalities. Forty years later, the U.S. Census Bureau reclassified Metropolitan Districts, which had included central cities and their contiguous suburbs, into the Standard Metropolitan Areas (SMA's), which include the urbanized area around multiple urban centers; this classification acknowledges the "polycentric" character of regions in the age of the automobile. Greater Boston was rapidly becoming part of a "megalopolis" stretching from Boston to Washington, D.C. In this megalopolis, networks of highways, railroads, airways, and telecommunications systems provide a common ground for overlapping systems of commuting, shopping, and business that extend down the eastern seaboard.

The 1950 Boston Standard Metropolitan Area included 2.34 million people living in 65 municipalities. The rapid growth outside the urban core would continue for the next half century, while the core lost population for decades before achieving minor increases toward the end of the twentieth century. In 1980, the U.S. Census applied the concept of the Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA), which incorporates two or more contiguous metropolitan areas. Under this classification, Boston's Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA) had 2.81 million people in 106 communities, while the CMSA had 169 communities and 3.97 million people. Today the Boston CMSA has a population count of 5.9 million in 280 communities in four states.

Since World War II, the automobile has driven the geographic expansion of Greater Boston. The spreading metropolitan area reflects a radical deconcentration of population, which has made Greater Boston a less densely settled region than sprawling Los Angeles. The Boston CMSA is made up of the following Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas (PMSA): Boston, Massachusetts and parts of New Hampshire; Brockton, Massachusetts; Lawrence, Massachusetts and parts of New Hampshire; Lowell, Massachusetts and parts of New Hampshire; Fitchburg-Leominster, Massachusetts; Worcester, Massachusetts and parts of Connecticut; New Bedford, Massachusetts; Portsmouth, New Hampshire and parts of Maine; Nashua, New Hampshire; Manchester, New Hampshire. This does not include the PMSA that includes Providence and Warwick, R.I., and Fall River, Massachusetts, which would bring the greater region's population close to 7 million. Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket, though sometimes considered part of Greater Boston, are counted as separate regions by the U.S. Census.

The sheer geographic size of Boston's metropolitan region makes it difficult to understand the entire region in a meaningful way for policy-making

and cultural identity. Those trying to address the issues of regional identity, transportation, economic development, housing, and environmental protection should probably focus on the Eastern Massachusetts communities in the Boston, Lowell, Lawrence, and Brockton PMSA's.

Controversies Over Regionalism in History

The City of Boston has long driven the regionalization debate. After the Civil War, civic leaders were apprehensive about the suburban exodus of the affluent, growing Irish political power, and diminished community prestige. They sought to annex surrounding communities. For almost a half-century, many citizens in urbanizing communities around Boston wanted to merge with the city to obtain street, water, sewer, and educational services. Boosters thought a bigger city would be better for business and bragging rights. Roxbury voted to be annexed by Boston in 1868; Dorchester merged with Boston in 1870; Charlestown, Brighton, and West Roxbury all joined the city in 1874. Brookline halted the movement that same year when its citizens voted not to join Boston. Satisfied with its infrastructure, fearing high taxes, and reluctant to give up its independence, Brookline opted to remain an independent town. Factions in Cambridge also sought a merger with Boston, but they never gained a majority. Hyde Park was the last town to approve merging with Boston, in 1912, but by that time the annexation movement was over.

In the following years, suburban communities grew to fear the immigrants, machine politics, messy industrialization, and high taxes. Middle-class families living in outlying communities viewed small-town life, with its participatory town meeting, low public expenditures, and social homogeneity, as desirable. They preferred a home life that had the rural moral qualities. Boston was the earliest large city to halt annexation and accede to municipal fragmentation. Other large American cities, particularly in the South and West, continue to annex outlying areas to this day.

As the Boston metropolitan area mushroomed in the late nineteenth century, the state established three specialized metropolitan agencies to manage regional infrastructure needs. These agencies were national pioneers in a different kind of regional government. The first was the Metropolitan Sewerage Commission, established in 1889 after fifteen years of debate. Sewerage made a logical starting point for regional government. Coordination was needed to prevent communities from dumping untreated sewage into rivers, polluting drinking water and endangering public health. Water and sewerage offered a quintessential regional issue; polluted water does not stop at an arbitrary city or town border.

In 1895, the state established the Metropolitan Water Board to provide the water supply to the region that the City of Boston had formerly provided. In 1901, the Water and Sewerage Boards were combined. The state-authorized metropolitan authority was a popular efficiency measure with suburban Yankees who feared wasteful spending and mismanagement by Boston's Irish machine politicians. Its directors were appointed by the governor, as opposed to being elected by an increasingly ethnic electorate. Another measure by the state to control Boston government was the state-named Municipal Finance Committee, which oversaw the City's financial affairs and curtailed home rule for decades.

Perhaps the most noteworthy regional achievement of the period was the creation of the Metropolitan Park Commission. The rapid suburban growth of the 1880s and 1890s consumed much open space and destroyed many Greater Boston natural beauty spots. Setting aside park land was a great urban reform of this era. In 1896, landscape planner Frederick Law Olmsted started consulting with Boston on green space planning, including designing Arnold Arboretum, the Fens, and Franklin Park. His efforts culminated in 1887 with the Emerald Necklace plan connecting the Boston Common with Franklin Park. The Trustees of Reservations, created in 1891, became the first private organization to work to preserve scenic and historical places around the state.

Landscape architect Charles Eliot (son of the Harvard University president of the same name) and journalist Sylvester Baxter promoted the idea of a Metropolitan Park Commission to use public funds to protect open space. In 1893, the state legislature established the Park Commission. The Park Commission used eminent domain to acquire five reservations with 7,000 acres during its first year. By 1902, the Park Commission managed 15,000 acres, including Revere Beach, the banks of much of the lower Charles River, the Blue Hills, Middlesex Fells, and twenty-two miles of right-of-way for parkways (today, 20,000 acres and 162 miles of parkway). The Metropolitan Park Commission created one of the great metropolitan park and parkway systems in the country. The MPC avoided much city-suburban wrangling by operating with a small board of five commissioners named by the governor.

By 1919, the state consolidated the Metropolitan Park Commission with the Metropolitan Water Board and Sewerage Commission to become the Metropolitan District Commission. The most noteworthy achievement of the consolidated MDC was the creation of the 39.4-square-mile Quabbin Reservoir fifty miles west of the city to provide a metropolitan water supply. In 1952, the legislature authorized the MDC to build and manage a refuse disposal plant serving seventeen municipalities. The MDC and the

municipalities could not agree upon the project and the bonding power lapsed. That was the last time the MDC was considered a vehicle for new initiatives.

The water and sewer concerns were split from the MDC in 1984 with the establishment of the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, which provides water and sewer service in communities at the core of Greater Boston. The MWRA has an eleven-member board made up of the Secretary of Environmental Affairs, four governor's appointees, three appointees of Boston's mayor, and three representatives of the MWRA Advisory Board. The Advisory Board has representatives from each town in the service area. The MDC's Division of Watershed Management was given responsibility to manage Quabbin Reservoir and the agency's other water supplies, while the MWRA distributes the water supply and treats the sewerage. Under federal court order, the MWRA has constructed a \$3.6-billion comprehensive sewerage treatment system to facilitate the cleaning of Boston Harbor.

Public transit in Greater Boston also eventually came under the direction of a public authority. In 1931, the legislature established the Metropolitan Transit District to assume financing obligations for the Boston Elevated Railway Company, which operated Boston's transit system in fourteen cities and towns. In 1947, the state bought the Boston Elevated Railway and placed the system under the Metropolitan Transit Authority. By 1964, the transit needs had grown in terms of investment and geography, so the state transformed the MTA into the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. The MBTA today provides subway, bus, commuter rail, and boat service in 175 communities. The MBTA is run by a seven-member board named by and serving coterminously with the governor. Each community in the MBTA service district has a seat on the Advisory Board, which has limited powers of approving the annual budget and hiring of the agency's general manager.

In 1956, the state legislature established yet another regional agency, the Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport), to manage the Port of Boston, Logan International Airport, and the Tobin Bridge. Today Massport also manages Hanscom Field and Worcester Airport. Massport, with a seven-member board named by the governor, has emerged as a powerful force in determining transportation policy in Boston and in promoting exports. Massport maintains its fiscal independence by relying on user fees and revenue bonding. Massport and the other state-established public authorities are closely tied to state government and the governor's administration, though they are not administered directly by the state. The region's municipalities have little say in policy or day-to-day administration.

The Debate Over Metropolitan Government

A century ago, as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts established special-purpose metropolitan authorities, Boston and its surrounding communities debated the possibility of creating a comprehensive metropolitan government. In 1896, a legislative commission rejected a proposal for creating a “super-city” of Boston through annexation of suburbs and instead recommended creation of a new County of Boston government based on the Greater London County Council. The County of Boston would have had central administration for sewerage, water, parks, and possibly roads and public transportation. The County of Boston would have been made up of forty communities in Suffolk County and parts of Essex, Middlesex, and Norfolk Counties. After reviewing the Commission’s proposal, the legislature let the matter die. Existing county officials and many outlying municipalities opposed metropolitan government because they did not want to give up any authority.

As Greater Boston continued to grapple with economic, infrastructure, and governmental problems, progressive leaders revisited the idea of metropolitan government. In 1907, the state established a Metropolitan Improvement Commission to study transportation improvements, maintaining the commercial vitality of Boston’s waterfront for shipping, and creation of a monumental civic center. One of the transportation recommendations was Arthur Shurtleff’s proposal for a circumferential road around Boston connected to the center with a web of radial roads. This plan ultimately led to Route 128 and the region’s highway system.

The high point of metropolitan sentiment was the “Boston—1915” campaign, initiated in 1909 by Edward A. Filene, Louis Brandeis, and James Jackson Storrow. The business-oriented champions of metropolitan government—inspired by the City Beautiful and City Functional movements sweeping America before World War I—wanted Greater Boston to use metropolitan government and scientific management to create the best planned, most prosperous, and most socially stable city in the country. Though criticized as Utopian by some, the “Boston—1915” plan recognized that social and economic problems threatened Boston’s viability and required far-reaching solutions.

In 1911, the state legislature created a special commission to respond to these proposals. The commission was made up of Filene, architect J. Randolph Coolidge, Jr., and nationally renowned planner John Nolen. The Commission’s final report proposed a metropolitan planning board for Boston and thirty-seven surrounding communities. The board’s purview would have included zoning, transportation, beautification, and

parks. The board would have had power to approve municipal plans and evaluate them in terms of a metropolitan plan. The primary incentive for surrounding communities to participate was funding from the metropolitan commission for a portion of local improvements. According to urban historian Mel Scott, Boston's metropolitan plan was the most ambitious and well-researched metropolitan planning effort in the country at a time when Progressive planning efforts were at a peak.³

The Boston Chamber of Commerce supported a metropolitan planning board in its report *'Real Boston': The 'Getting Together' Spirit Among Cities and Towns* (1911). The Chamber argued that "real" Boston included 1.5 million inhabitants and forty municipalities stretching from Salem to Cohasset and including Lincoln, Lexington, Wayland, Framingham, Sherborn, and Canton. Boston Mayor John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, seeking to strengthen the services and fiscal health of the central city, also supported the metropolitan scheme.

Within a few months of the commission's 1912 report, however, suburban legislators killed the metropolitan government plan. Communities led by the affluent suburbs of Brookline and Newton refused to participate. The metropolitan plan seemed anti-democratic and its purported benefits doubtful. After this, the steam ran out of the metropolitan vision and the "Boston—1915" movement.

Part of the reason that metropolitan government did not seem attractive to suburban communities was that they no longer needed Boston to obtain high-quality public services. Prior to 1900, metropolitan government had seemed attractive to suburbs because it was a way of providing Boston's up-to-date infrastructure services to communities that lacked the capacity. Afterward, the many suburbs developed a wide range of municipal services that they were able to provide with greater efficiency than the machine-plagued central city government.

In 1930, at the beginning of the Great Depression, Mayor James Michael Curley proposed a metropolitan scheme that would have federated Boston with forty-three surrounding communities and required them to pay their share of the region's public improvements. This proposal would have concentrated more power with the Boston Mayor than the "Boston—1915" plan. A hostile legislature rejected the Curley proposal. A Cambridge official saw it in personal terms, telling the *Boston Post* (February 11, 1930) that: "Metropolitan Boston is Curley gone Napoleon." During the 1930s, the state was at constant loggerheads with the City of Boston, whether the Mayor was Curley or someone else, about construction and employment programs, always seeking to curtail perceived corruption and excessive

spending. The Democratic-Republican and Irish-Yankee conflicts that rent Massachusetts politics for decades ended up pitting Boston against the suburbs and poisoning efforts to undertake regional initiatives. A forty-year economic downturn, from 1921 until 1960, made resources scarce and intensified political tensions over regional cooperation.

While Boston was balking at regional planning, New York City assumed leadership in the field while avoiding creation of an integrated metropolitan government. The New York Regional Plan Association, a private non-profit civic association with substantial business backing, published its first regional plan in 1929. New York's "master builder," Robert Moses, working through independent public authorities, implemented many of the transportation, recreational, and housing elements of the plan over a twenty-five-year period.

The idea of metropolitan government did not go away in Boston. In 1944, Boston was seeking to revive its economic fortunes, and the Boston Society of Architects initiated the "Boston Contest of 1944" to obtain ideas. The winning proposal came from Harvard political science professor Carl Friedrich, who argued that the metropolitan area had become "ill, decaying at the core, because its vitality has not been a common concern of all those having a stake in it."⁴ Friedrich proposed that all communities within a twenty-five-mile radius of Boston should become part of the Boston Metropolitan Authority. The proposed Metropolitan Authority would use a city manager form of government with a legislative council that organized existing municipalities into districts.

Metropolitan government continued to exert an appeal. One historian notes: "The intellectual elite and many of the businessmen of the Boston area probably yearned more intensely for metropolitan planning and metropolitan government than community leaders anywhere else in the United States, partly from a sense of frustration."⁵ The suburbs remained unsupportive of regionalization, with about 70 percent responding that the "Boston Contest" proposal was only another approach to annexation. After the "rascal king" James Michael Curley won reelection as Mayor in 1945 while under indictment for mail fraud—as a supporter of the "Greater Boston" federation—the chance for legislative approval of regional government diminished to practically zero.

That was the last time that Boston area leaders seriously considered comprehensive metropolitan government. The purported benefits were simply not enticing to self-sufficient suburbs. Civic leaders began to focus on aggressive urban renewal within the municipal borders. The City of Boston moved forward with redevelopment efforts during the 1950s and 1960s and lost interest in regionalization. During the urban crisis of the 1960s, some reformers advocated sharing suburban tax resources for housing and education.

Suburbanites, however, opposed such initiatives. Many had just fled the decaying central city, and they regarded the urban ills of poverty, crime, racial strife, and physical decay to be irremediable.

At the same time, urban politicians across the country were wary of regional consolidation because they did not want to cede any power to the growing suburbs.

Mayor Kevin White proposed creating an Eastern Massachusetts Council of Governments—so named to make it more palatable to the Boston-phobic suburbs. When White lost his bid for governor in 1970, the proposal disappeared. San Francisco had pioneered the council of governments (COG) concept in the 1960s when it established the Association of Bay Area Governments, which has long supervised regional planning efforts. The city-county consolidations of the 1970s, which were taking place in Indianapolis, Nashville, and Jacksonville made no sense in Boston because county government was irrelevant.

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) was the one new regional institution to be established since World War II. It was intended to be strictly advisory. The Rev. W. Seavey Joyce of Boston College, a leader in Boston's redevelopment, used the Boston College Citizen's Seminar to advocate for creating a regional planning agency and became MAPC's first chairman in 1963. The 1962 Federal-Aid Highway Act required communities receiving federal highway funds to develop regional organizations to coordinate transportation planning. Municipalities agreed to join the MAPC to influence highway planning with state and federal officials and to obtain federal grants. Beyond that, they remained suspicious of ceding any powers to metropolitan agencies.

MAPC was a state agency between 1963 and 1971, when it became an independent organization with a board made up of municipal officials, state officials, Boston officials, and gubernatorial appointees. MAPC lost the opportunity to gain more clout in shaping transportation priorities when it was not designated the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) under the 1973 Federal Highway Act; that responsibility, instead, went to the newly-created Central Transportation Planning Staff, which is closely connected to the State Department of Transportation. An opportunity was lost to coordinate transportation with land use and economic development planning. Since then, MAPC has developed an advisory regional plan and provided technical planning assistance to member communities.

The Parts of the Whole

One way to develop a regionalism that suits Greater Boston's local sense of place would be to build on the shared interests of sub-regions, such as the

North Shore, South Shore, Metro West, and the Interstate 495 Corridor. In contrast with almost every other state in the union, Massachusetts counties have not been useful geographic or political territories for years. The regional planning areas and their sub-regions offer potentially more manageable subdivisions for understanding the challenges of development, transportation, housing, the environment, and related issues.

The Subregions of Greater Boston

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council already sorts its 101 cities and towns into eight sub-regions (a few towns participate in two sub-regions, but only one affiliation is given here), whose elected officials meet regularly to develop policies for planning, transportation, and economic development issues. The sub-regions break down this way:

- *Inner Core:* Arlington, Boston, Belmont, Braintree, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Holbrook, Lynn, Malden, Medford, Melrose, Nahant, Newton, Quincy, Randolph, Revere, Saugus, Somerville, Waltham, Watertown, and Winthrop.
- *North Shore:* Beverly, Danvers, Essex, Gloucester, Hamilton, Ipswich, Manchester, Marblehead, Middleton, Peabody, Rockport, Salem, Swampscott, Topsfield, and Wenham.
- *North Suburban:* Bedford, Burlington, Lexington, Lynnfield, North Reading, Reading, Stoneham, Wakefield, Wilmington, Winchester, and Woburn.
- *Minuteman:* Acton, Bolton, Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Hudson, Lincoln, Littleton, Maynard, and Stow.
- *Metro West:* Ashland, Framingham, Marlborough, Natick, Southborough, Sudbury, Wayland, Wellesley, and Weston.
- *South West:* Bellingham, Franklin, Holliston, Hopkinton, Medway, Milford, Millis, Sherborn, and Wrentham.
- *Three Rivers:* Canton, Dedham, Dover, Foxborough, Medfield, Milton, Needham, Norfolk, Norwood, Sharon, Stoughton, Walpole, and Westwood.
- *South Shore:* Cohasset, Duxbury, Hanover, Hingham, Hull, Marshfield, Norwell, Pembroke, Rockland, Scituate, and Weymouth.

Except for the 23-community Inner Core, the number of municipalities per sub-region ranges from nine to fifteen. These groupings generally reflect historical affiliations, business and shopping sub-regions, media sub-markets, and high school rivalries. They provide a rough framework for people to

understand the area in which they live, work, shop, and socialize. Sub-regions of approximately fifteen communities allow for some measure of consensus-building and policy-making.

Other organizations help to coordinate planning outside the MAPC territory. The Old Colony Planning Council, based in Brockton, takes in fifteen communities stretching from Avon to Plymouth. They include Abington, Avon, Bridgewater, Brockton, East Bridgewater, Easton, Halifax, Hanson, Kingston, Pembroke, Plymouth, Plympton, Stoughton, West Bridgewater, and Whitman. The Old Colony area is one of the fastest growing areas in Greater Boston and can benefit from regional cooperation.

The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, headquartered in Haverhill, provides a compact northern counterpart to Old Colony. Merrimack Valley has fifteen municipalities including Amesbury, Andover, Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Haverhill, Lawrence, Merrimac, Methuen, Newbury, Newburyport, North Andover, Rowley, Salisbury, and West Newbury. These communities, connected by Interstate 495 and Interstate 93, are some of the fastest growing parts of the metropolitan area.

Greater Lowell is the focus of the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments. This regional planning agency serves nine communities: Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Dunstable, Lowell, Pepperell, Tewksbury, Tyngsborough, and Westford.

Southeastern Massachusetts is less in the orbit of Greater Boston, being centered on the urban centers of Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton and connected to Providence. The Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD), based in Taunton, covers Acushnet, Attleboro, Berkley, Carver, Dartmouth, Dighton, Fairhaven, Fall River, Freetown, Lakeville, Mansfield, Marion, Mattapoisett, Middleboro, New Bedford, North Attleboro, Norton, Plainville, Raynham, Rehoboth, Rochester, Seekonk, Somerset, Swansea, Taunton, Wareham, and Westport.

The southern part of this district is sometimes referred to for marketing purposes as “The South Coast,” while the northern area is bisected by I-495 and is undergoing significant growth. Southeastern Massachusetts is considered a “new growth frontier” of Massachusetts. Fifty municipalities from the SRPEDD, Old Colony, and southern MAPC districts have formed a “smart growth” planning coalition called Vision 2020 or the New Mayflower Compact. The voluntary effort is promoting master planning and lobbying for increased state assistance for the region.

The Interstate 495 Corridor might hold the greatest promise for regional collaboration. The fastest growing area of the state, I-495 was constructed during the 1960s outside the major metropolitan infrastructure systems in

rural land. Metropolitan growth gradually moved outward, and the corridor became a hot spot for such high technology companies as EMC, Intel, Cisco Systems, and Compaq. It is comparable to Silicon Valley in its early years. Development has brought in its wake traffic congestion, strained water and sewer resources, municipal finance problems, rising housing costs, and concerns about the quality of life. Traffic increased three- to four-fold along I-495 between 1977 and 1997. Wastewater runoff exceeds the capacity of local waterways to handle it. The groundwater within the area's watersheds is not sufficient to meet growing demand.

In 1997, local officials, the state legislators, planning agencies, and business leaders formed the I-495 Technology Corridor Initiative/Campaign for Shared Solutions to coordinate planning efforts for 42 communities stretching along the western arc of I-495 from Westford to Foxborough. This endeavor is a voluntary problem-solving entity. MAPC and the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative provide staffing and analytical planning studies. The participating towns are trying to establish a regional transit authority and are seeking shared solutions to water and sewer problems. A comparable regional effort is starting in western Route 128 communities that are grappling with increasing traffic and the strains of rapid real-estate development.

Another approach to regionalism builds on New England's intense local sense of place. The Blackstone Valley (established in 1986) and Essex County National Heritage Areas (established in 1996) have affiliated with the National Park Service to interpret, preserve, and market the history of those regions. A third national heritage area called "Freedom's Way," celebrating the history of revolutionaries, inventors, transcendentalists, and reformers, is being proposed for thirty-four communities from Arlington to Gardner. These heritage areas, with local representation on their governing commissions, provide a forum for creative thinking about preserving and interpreting regions. The Blackstone Valley has been the most effective in using its heritage area to identify natural and cultural resources deserving of preservation and developing joint municipal strategies for economic development. In most cases, however, heritage area commissions have limited resources and planning authority and seldom do more than historic preservation and tourism development.

Another way to subdivide Greater Boston is by watersheds, geologic regions, or U.S. Environmental Protection Agency eco-regions. The Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs has recently embarked on a Watershed Initiative, which seeks to protect and restore ecosystems. The MAPC area alone includes watersheds for the Charles River, Mystic River, Shawsheen, Neponset River and Weymouth/Weir, South

Coastal, North Coastal, and Sudbury-Assabet-Concord Rivers. The National Park Service provides technical assistance through its Wild and Scenic Rivers program. Watershed planning has improved water quality and affected some land-use decisions, but it remains a specialized tool for regional policy.

Greater Boston's Localism

Policy makers seeking creative approaches for addressing sprawl in Greater Boston often point to the Cape Cod Commission as a model, but many activists question whether a powerful regional planning agency could ever be established in Greater Boston. Whatever vehicles or strategies might be adopted to address the negative consequences of sprawl, it seems clear that a strong culture of “home rule” poses formidable obstacles to muscular regionalism.

The U.S. Census Bureau's system for analyzing New England's metropolitan areas underscores the uniqueness of the region's intense localism. In the rest of the country, counties are the building blocks of metropolitan areas. Counties address the full range of public policy issues, from roads and transit to schools and redevelopment. Many counties include “unincorporated” areas, that is, communities that are not formally part of a city or town but simply receive necessary services from the county. In New England, the municipality provides the basic unit of the metropolitan governance. Every square inch of land is incorporated as part of a municipality. The town's sovereignty is strengthened by the tradition of the town meeting in many communities.

As many Eastern Massachusetts communities became residential suburbs to Boston, the sense of town separateness has increased. Affluent and middle-class families flee the problems of the city to find a haven in the suburbs. Suburbs have become finely gradated by class. The wealthier the community, the more its residents worked to exclude undesirable commercial and residential development. Although suburbanites might work, shop, and seek entertainment in Boston, they conceived themselves as “living” in Belmont, Wellesley, or Norwood.

As is the case across the nation, suburbs in Greater Boston have developed harsh critiques of all aspects of city life and governance—high taxes, bloated bureaucracy, poor schools, crime, and corruption. When regionalism is offered as a solution to the problems of the city or the region, the suburbs have resisted it. During the “urban crisis” of the 1960s, this aversion to the city reached its apogee. In more recent years, Boston's revitalization has made the city more appealing to the middle class and its social problems have become less threatening. But finding common ground among the region's core cities and its suburban communities remains difficult. Issues like housing, education, taxes, and crime essentially pit communities against each other,

with the “haves” seeking to retain their economic and social advantages and the “have-nots” seeking to gain access to the resources of the entire region. Housing is perhaps the most intense example of this zero-sum conflict: While Boston Mayor Thomas Menino pushes suburbs to build more affordable housing, most suburbs are wary of bringing in less affluent populations that would impose new burdens on schools, traffic, and other aspects of community life.

Boston’s role as the “hub” of the region has deterred regionalism by stealing the limelight from surrounding communities. Historic landmarks, sports teams, a powerful mayor, the colorful politics of Beacon Hill, and a city-fixated media contribute to the urban-suburban divide. When locals or tourists describe Greater Boston they identify such central city institutions as the Red Sox, Celtics, Bruins, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Quincy Market, and Harvard University. Much of the rest of the region within the I-495 beltway, where millions live, seems much less real to outsiders. The suburbs of Boston often express resentment at Boston’s higher profile, which makes finding common ground that much harder.

Persuading outlying communities that regionalism will bring tangible benefits and an equal partnership with Boston is always a difficult task. Suburbs express extreme reluctance to grant more political control to urban centers or to create “new layers of bureaucracy.” A 1997 survey commissioned by the Regionalization Commission found that voters opposed creating a new “regional government” and held negative views toward any arrangement that might threaten local autonomy. Those surveyed favored “cooperative action” between municipalities in delivering services if it were done voluntarily. The Regionalization Commission survey also found that most voters think their town governments are doing well at delivering services.⁶

A further obstacle to regionalism is the more general cynicism and lack of confidence toward government and politics. These sentiments had their origin a century ago in the Progressive Era, when civic reformers promoted the un-elected public authority as a way to avoid political corruption and achieve scientific management. Since the 1970s, the public has disengaged more from politics and turned away from new government initiatives. In Greater Boston, there has been no serious proposal to create new levels of regional government. Regionalism is a progressive “good government” issue that appeals to committed activists. The leaders of regionalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were businessmen, who saw regional services as the key to promoting local growth.

Regionalism does not make an easy fit with the “transactional” and personal politics practiced in Greater Boston and Massachusetts. Many

Bostonians embrace the conservative idea that local government is less likely to make mistakes than layers of government further from the people—and that mistakes in a limited number of towns will not hurt the region as a whole.

Some communities reaffirm their local identity by resisting regional endeavors. For example, Weston recently vetoed construction of a regional bike trail that would follow the abandoned Wayside train line through Belmont, Waltham, Weston, Wayland, Sudbury, and Hudson to Berlin. Westonites expressed fears about intruders, crime, and visual blight. The state said if all towns did not go along with the bike trail plan, then the project would be scrapped. A similar controversy has bogged down the extension of the MBTA's Greenbush Line through Braintree, Weymouth, Hingham, Cohasset, and Scituate. The 17.5-mile commuter rail line is anticipated to provide a public transit alternative to the automobile for South Shore communities. Some local residents have opposed the project, arguing that the restored transit service would increase local traffic and development pressures. Homeowners have protested that the train would pass very close to their homes.

After 17 years of planning, the State Secretary of Environmental Affairs Robert Durand approved the Final Environmental Impact Report for the Greenbush line reconstruction in 2001. Although the approved plan attempts to deal with local concerns, some critics vow to continue fighting the project.

Greater Boston's Regional Challenges

Even as Greater Boston's economy thrives, the region faces problems that affect its competitiveness and liveability. Some can be treated on a decentralized community-based approach, while others might require state or metropolitan-level action.

One of the most tenacious regional problems—traffic congestion—stems from the region's shift of jobs and population from the urban core toward Route 128 and Interstate 495. According to studies of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, the percent of vehicle miles traveled in Greater Boston has grown by 75 percent since 1970. MAPC projects that the number of vehicle miles traveled will increase another 26 percent between 1990 and 2020. The lack of public transit options—or new forms of private transportation services like jitneys—forces most commuters in these areas to drive their cars to work. As tens of thousands have moved farther out seeking a rural small-town way of life, the qualities they seek are coming under stress as employers and retailers follow the growing market.

Affordable housing poses another difficult challenge. The high cost of housing makes it difficult for many middle-class and working-class families to afford living in Greater Boston and discourages in-migrants who are needed desperately to work in the labor-scarce regional economy. A coalition headed by the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston has called for development of 35,000 affordable units over the next five years, but experts and activists differ on the best strategy to achieve that goal. Affordable housing advocates state that money is the principal means toward new housing; total spending at the state's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) dropped from \$605 million to \$448 million from 1989 to 1999, and DHCD spending as a share of total state government spending fell from 3.6 percent to 1.4 percent. But other analysts argue that regulatory barriers to housing construction dramatically increase the cost and timeline for housing construction. A divisive controversy over Chapter 40B, the thirty-year-old "anti-snob zoning" legislation, has dogged the housing debate. Supporters of 40B say that it offers developers a mechanism to override local resistance to affordable housing development, while detractors say it runs roughshod over local concerns about the character of cities and towns. Ultimately, the solution to the affordable housing issue requires some mix of state policies, regional funding mechanisms, and numerous local development projects.

Social inequity remains a difficult challenge for a region as fragmented as Greater Boston. A recent book by Barry Bluestone of Northeastern University and Mary Huff Stevenson of the University of Massachusetts at Boston found that the region suffers a wide income gap despite a thirty-year period of "renaissance."⁷ Older cities still have significant concentrations of poverty and minority residents. Seventy-five percent of metropolitan-area African-Americans live in Boston, Cambridge, Brockton, and Lynn, and 33 percent of Hispanics and 26 percent of Asians live in Boston. Geographical mobility affects social mobility. The isolation of racial minorities and poor people undermines their ability to find employment and develop social networks that enable them to achieve upward mobility.

Municipal property tax inequality is a growing issue. Some communities absorb large numbers of new families and the costs of educating children while others reap tax windfalls from new office parks or shopping malls. Some communities zone excessive areas for business development in order to attract as much "paying" development as possible. "Smart growth" advocates argue that tax-sharing might provide adequate municipal revenues to the tax-base haves and have-nots and relieve the need for new commercial development that creates traffic congestion and consumes the state's diminishing open space.

Adequate office space and industrial space also poses a problem for the region. Downtown Boston had less than a four percent office vacancy rate in the latter half of 2001. Greater Boston has the fourth highest office rental rates in the country. The lack of office space is a serious constraint on future economic development. Where to build new work facilities is an economic development and a growth management issue. Meanwhile, the region's sprawling growth patterns have become highly inefficient; between 1982 and 1997, the Boston CMSA population grew by 6.7 percent while the increase in urbanized land was 46.9 percent.

The Cape Cod Commission has adopted a "growth center" policy that might offer a model for Greater Boston. The policy offers regulatory incentives for businesses to locate in developed areas that have sufficient infrastructure and to avoid developing "greenfields." MAPC's MetroPlan has designated fifteen Concentrated Development Centers with sufficient transportation, water, and sewer capacity. Some municipalities have used MAPC's advisory guidelines to direct new development, but the designations carry no authority.

Because of Greater Boston's historic pattern of polycentric development, emulation of Oregon's nationally renowned "urban growth boundary" concept—which prevents new development beyond a fixed boundary around the region—might not be possible in Greater Boston. Maryland's strategy of providing state infrastructure funds only for previously developed communities might make more sense in Massachusetts. The "grayfields" strategy championed by new urbanist Peter Calthorpe—redeveloping suburban shopping strips and abandoned military installations characterized by their asphalt surfaces—might also make sense for the Commonwealth.

Underlying all efforts to improve the quality of community life lurks the daunting challenge of improving public education. Under-performing public education in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods is an issue of economic development as well as social equity. Financial disparities between school districts complicates matters. Greater Boston could lose its competitive economic edge because of a shortage of trained workers. The Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training projects that the Massachusetts economy will expand by 400,000 jobs by 2006. An additional 740,000 jobs will need to be filled to replace workers who retire, move up the career ladder, or change careers. The state relies on in-migrant workers to fill many of these positions, but the high cost of housing is a disincentive for workers to move here.

If Greater Boston were a country, its economy would rank twenty-third in the world, ahead of Belgium and Sweden, just behind Russia and Switzerland. The American cities ahead of Boston are New York (14), Los Angeles (16), and Chicago (18).⁸ Leaders of many metropolitan areas have

concluded that regional planning is necessary to compete in a global economy. Prominent private non-profit organizations spearheading regional development strategies include Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network, New York Regional Plan Association, Chicago 2020, The Austin Network, and Pittsburgh Innovation Works. These business-oriented groups, champions of free market entrepreneurship, do not want to leave their region's economic future to the whim of the marketplace.

Various entities are concerned about economic development strategy for Greater Boston—the State Office of Economic Affairs, the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, the New England Council, statewide technology trade associations, MAPC's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee—but no single entity has convened all the relevant parties and shaped a comprehensive regional strategy. The 1997 Regionalization Committee recommended an Economic Development Forum and a Council of Governments to play the convening role for Greater Boston, but it has not materialized.

Dealing with growth issues requires a strategic understanding of the region. A regional growth strategy might require going beyond the technocratic approaches that work well for regional water, sewer, park, and public transit services. Whatever and however the region's agencies and organizations are mobilized, regional strategy requires a complex and delicate dialogue. The Cape Cod Commission has transformed the politics of that region. The Commission has built its strategy around an understanding of the distinctive advantages, economic needs, and power structures of the Cape's sub-regions. A Greater Boston strategy would have to develop a coherent regional economic development vision geared to the needs and politics of eight or ten sub-regions.

Home rule remains the biggest political hurdle to strong regional planning. Many town officials are reluctant to cede authority to regional bodies. Some real estate development interests oppose growth management legislation because they fear constraints on their freedom of action. Environmentalists and businesspersons are not used to talking with each other about their issues. Effective regional planning engages a broad range of constituencies. By binding them together in a common dialogue, Greater Boston could strengthen its sense of regionalism and make headway with the difficult issues of growth and social equity.

The Players in Greater Boston

State government has always played a preeminent role in addressing Greater Boston's regional issues. It helps that Boston is both the state capital and the

state's largest city. The state enacts the policies and provides the institutional structure and the financing for regional initiatives, especially for pressing infrastructure needs.

The metropolitan authorities are creatures of the state. The Metropolitan District Commission, for instance, operates as a department under the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs with its own commissioners. Statewide programs such as highway construction and state parks and forests ultimately serve regional and local purposes. The state determines broad education policy through major initiatives like the Education Reform Act of 1993 and school funding formulas, but schools are managed locally. The state shapes housing policy through subsidies, financing, incentives, and planning of the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency (now called Mass Housing) and the Department of Housing and Community Development. One reason regionalism has developed slowly in Greater Boston may be because state government has been relatively responsive to the regional issues.

The state legislature would have to enact major legislation before metropolitan-scale planning could occur in Greater Boston. State initiatives would be necessary for more aggressive regional approaches to affordable housing or tax-sharing arrangements. The legislature has shown a willingness to create new regional structures such as the Martha's Vineyard Commission and the Cape Cod Commission.

The biggest problem with reliance on the state government to address regional issues is that the legislature's "inside baseball" can stymie regional initiatives and disempower local communities. The process of legislative bartering tends to focus on discrete projects in communities rather than a comprehensive approach to policymaking, particularly on issues with traditionally strong local control like land-use planning and housing development.

County government has never been as strong in New England as in the rest of the country. The county was used to organize courts, jails, and registries of deeds, to build local highways, and to provide welfare; all but prisons and jails have been transferred to the state. The state's plans to abolish county government in the mid-1990s provoked little resistance, largely because the Boston area counties of Suffolk, Middlesex, Norfolk, and Essex were not well-recognized regions or useful vehicles for addressing policy issues. When the Weld-Cellucci Administration set out to abolish county government, it only abolished counties that enjoyed little local support. The legislature eliminated Middlesex, Essex, Worcester, Berkshire, and Hampden with hardly a complaint. Hampshire, Franklin, and Northern Middlesex turned themselves into Regional Councils of Government (COGs). Norfolk,

Plymouth, Suffolk, Bristol, Barnstable, Dukes, and Nantucket live on because of local political backing. The remaining counties, except for Barnstable (Cape Cod), are not effective regional policy-making institutions.

The state-authorized metropolitan authorities—the Metropolitan District Commission, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, and Massport—continue to provide important services to the Greater Boston region. The agency with the greatest potential for growth is the MBTA, which is under many demands for expanded service. The MBTA is constructing the Greenbush commuter rail line along the South Shore and the Silver Line from the developing South Boston Waterfront District to Roxbury in Boston. The MBTA is also studying creation of the Urban Ring, which would provide rapid transit service on a circumferential route through Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, and Everett. Suburban communities also are seeking to increase public transit options.

Massport plays a major role in air transportation, modernizing Logan Airport and expanding service at Worcester. Massport is even floating the idea to manage all the major commercial airports in New England. As water supply and sewer needs increase in outlying communities, especially the I-495 Corridor, the MWRA may be called upon to expand coverage beyond its 61 communities—forty-six with water from Quabbin Reservoir and forty-three using the Boston Harbor sewerage treatment facilities. The MDC, which is under pressure within state government to reduce its scope of services, seems unlikely to expand its role in regional governance in the foreseeable future.

As the discussion about growth management and affordable housing heats up, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) seeks to expand its advisory role. MAPC is currently revisiting its plan for the region, originally adopted in 1990, which may attract a more receptive audience for regionalism this time around.

Around the periphery of MAPC's service area, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, Northern Middlesex Council of Governments, Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, Old Colony Planning Council, and Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District are in various phases of regional planning. If the state provides support for regional plans by enacting the Livable Communities Act, a bill sponsored by State Senator Mark Pacheco, a Democrat of Taunton, the regional planning agencies will receive funding for regional policy plans and the opportunity to expand their policy-making function.

Municipal governments rule the roost in local policy-making and service-delivery. They are reluctant to give up any existing powers to regional bodies or the state government. Local control is less than it may seem, however. The state determines municipal revenue levels through the real estate tax constraints of Proposition 2½ and annual local aid. Although the municipalities operate the schools, the state exerts great influence over educational financing, curriculum, and performance evaluation. State Law Chapter 40A, unchanged in decades, governs local zoning regulation. Municipalities do participate in voluntary inter-local compacts for obtaining solid waste disposal, libraries, and purchasing supplies. The proposed Urban Ring is being developed by a compact of six cities and towns under the direction of the MBTA in a process managed by the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

Universities and non-profit organizations are playing an increasingly important role in analyzing the problems of Greater Boston and bringing together interest groups. The University of Massachusetts at Boston has long explored regional issues at its John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs. The Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government was established in 2000 to research regional issues, spark dialogue among different interest groups, and promote improved levels of local government. Northeastern University's Center for Urban and Regional Policy was commissioned by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston to develop a "new paradigm" for housing in the region, which was released in 2000. The Urban Ecology Institute at Boston College has developed curricular programs for public schools and helped to generate a new regional dialogue around the rivers that shape eastern Massachusetts.

The Boston Foundation and the City of Boston in 2000 published a comprehensive listing of socioeconomic indicators to measure changes in the quality of life in Boston. *The Wisdom of Our Choices: Boston's Indicators of Progress, Change and Sustainability* will be updated every two years and possibly supplemented with a regional indicators report and database. The Citizens Housing and Planning Association in 2001 released a study by Minneapolis-St. Paul regionalist Myron Orfield concerning a regional strategy for affordable housing and social equity in Greater Boston. The Boston Society of Architects' Civic Initiative for a Livable New England has attracted substantial attention to regional growth issues. The Environmental League of Massachusetts, the state's leading environmental lobbying group, is promoting legislative passage of the Livable Communities Act, which would enhance regional and local planning capacity. Niel Pierce, an advocate of regional governments and economies that he calls "citistates," is developing an analysis

of New England issues in cooperation with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

Businesses and developers understand the region well and site companies and housing to meet a regional market. Many companies that undergird the regional economic base—in technology, medicine, and finance—have a sophisticated understanding of the regional job market, infrastructure, and real estate. They have an interest in maintaining regional competitiveness, but are wary of being constrained by new government policies. In an age of corporate consolidation, fewer corporations have strong local ties.

Policy Options for Regionalism

The idea that Greater Boston's problems must be addressed with a regional approach does not necessarily translate to agreement on the specific strategy. Some argue that since Massachusetts is geographically compact—requiring just over three hours to traverse the state from end to end—state policy should direct regional planning and development. Others argue that the state contains numerous regions that have different political and policy challenges; each region, according to this view, needs a distinct and coherent approach. Still others claim that local governments will always be the major unit of policy on planning and development, and that they should be mobilized to meet larger regional goals.

State Politics and Regionalism

As advocates of regionalism try to develop political support around growth management issues, they must remember that it will not be strictly a Greater Boston issue but a statewide issue that will require support from other regions of the state. Experience in Oregon, Vermont, New Jersey, Georgia, Florida, and Maryland shows that effective growth management requires state action. Some of these states have established statewide planning standards while others have required metropolitan areas to develop regional plans.

Governor William F. Weld provided some momentum for “smart growth” by issuing Executive Order 385, which orders state agencies not to carry out policies that encourage sprawl, but the order has generally been neglected. Governor A. Paul Cellucci's Executive Order 418, which called for comprehensive analyses of different development scenarios, offers powerful data for planners if they are made available through the Internet. The state also is offering \$30,000 municipal Community Development Plan grants under the Executive Order 418 program.

The state legislature has been considering the Livable Communities Act (LCA)—previously known as the Sustainable Development Act—which

would support regional policy plans and local comprehensive plans. The LCA would create a three-tiered planning structure in Massachusetts. At the top level would be a state Council for a Sustainable Commonwealth, made up mainly of state department heads coordinating their growth management policies. At the next level, the state would provide funding for strengthened regional planning agencies with regional policy plans and the potential to regulate large developments. At the local level, the state would provide resources for city and town comprehensive plans. The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs would be responsible for staffing this program.

A supportive governor can provide important leadership for growth management efforts. In Maryland, for instance, Governor Parris Glendening has been the foremost “smart growth” advocate in the state, placing Maryland at the forefront of the issue. Republican Governors Weld, Cellucci, and Jane M. Swift have supported such initiatives when they show strong public backing. Environmental Affairs Secretary Robert Durand has led the way on growth management issues.

Some argue that Massachusetts should reinstate the Office of State Planning, which Frank Keefe directed during the first Dukakis administration from 1975 to 1979. The Office of State Planning’s *Massachusetts Growth Policy Report—City and Town Centers: A Program for Growth* (1977) encouraged urban revitalization and preserving the character of small towns and rural areas. Governor Edward King abolished the office, and Dukakis did not reinstate it during his subsequent terms. Even without the Office of State Planning, the state followed through on its policies of channeling significant state investment into infrastructure, parking, and Heritage State Park facilities in urban centers like Lowell, Springfield, New Bedford, Fall River, and Northampton, and developing a program for preserving agricultural land.

The state executive departments and the legislature have many tools at their command, including funding programs and the ability to create new regulatory and planning powers, to deal with local and regional issues. State departments are oriented to serving localities in planning and community development funding.

The state’s ambivalence toward regionalism is evident in the recent debate about Governor Jane Swift’s proposal to shift management of the Metropolitan District Commission’s 162 miles of scenic parkways to the Massachusetts Highway Department. Environmental advocates have objected to the proposal out of fear that highway engineers might destroy the appearance of parkways to improve traffic efficiency. Another bill would place the metropolitan parks under the state Department of Environmental

Management and virtually do away with the MDC. Some politicians argue the MDC's park system could be more efficiently managed by the state. This would remove any semblance of regional management over these Greater Boston resources.

There are drawbacks to relying upon the state to take the lead in dealing with Greater Boston regional growth issues. State-oriented initiatives can have a top-down quality that, at the least, lacks the political energy of citizen-based activities and, at worst, alienates local communities. New urbanists Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton have pointed out that: "The recent experience of what we call 'state-led regionalism' suggests that the bureaucratic, regulatory approaches that states have traditionally adopted cannot by themselves be effective. They must be supported by a whole panoply of affirmative efforts [by local government and non-profit organizations]."

Regional Planning Agencies

One obvious candidate for leadership of regional planning and development is the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. By updating the MetroPlan of 1990, which proposed focusing state resources on Concentrated Development Centers, the MAPC could outline a comprehensive strategy not only for reviving existing urban centers but also protecting farmlands and rural communities from intensive new growth. MAPC's MetroPlan update could provide a forum for housing, environmental, and economic development groups and thus shape stronger regional initiatives. Because of the MAPC's advisory nature, the 1990 MetroPlan has not changed development patterns substantially.

The biggest factor in MAPC's favor is that it already exists. The 136-member board—which includes the chief elected officials of 101 cities and towns, representatives from state agencies, and citizen appointees of the governor—already convenes leaders from the region inside Interstate 495. Given political authority in certain key issues, the MAPC might revive the planning dialogue initiated by the old State Office of Planning.

For now, the MAPC's influence comes from its capacity to convene people on issues of regional importance. The I-495 Technology Corridor Initiative, which MAPC helps staff, is a sub-regional example of how MAPC can create more workable regions and mitigate local criticisms of a remote planning bureaucracy. A sub-regional planning committee made up of elected local officials with professional staff from MAPC can alleviate concerns about accountability.

Passage of the Livable Communities Act would mandate and fund regional plans. The bill would authorize regional planning agencies to review

developments of regional impact, as their sister agencies on Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard already do. This is the most controversial part of the Livable Communities Act and the one most opposed by development interests.

Using Local Government for Regional Purposes

Since local identity runs so strong in Massachusetts, it might make sense to leverage local government to achieve regional goals. A good example of communities working toward both local and regional ends is the Community Preservation Act, which permits municipalities to adopt up to a 3-percent real estate tax surcharge for open space purchase, historic preservation, and affordable housing. Besides the Cape and the Islands, a couple dozen communities have passed this tax and are purchasing properties.

Though most people believe Massachusetts communities have “local control” over land-use decisions, a growing zoning reform movement argues that “home rule” in zoning is illusory. Spearheaded by state legislators like Senator Pamela Resor of Acton, Representative Douglas Petersen of Marblehead, and former Representative John Stasik of Framingham, the nascent zoning reform coalition argues that the by-right zoning under State Law Chapter 40A does not give communities effective control over many large developments and subdivisions. “Grandfather” clauses, “approval not required” subdivisions, and “zoning freezes” are among the antiquated provisions that tie municipal hands in planning and zoning.

If Greater Boston municipalities are unwilling to grant regulatory power to regional planning agencies, they might try to obtain for themselves stronger local planning powers, adopting some of the planning tools already delegated to the Cape Cod Commission. For instance, municipalities could be granted power to review large projects according to minimum performance standards, instead of through by-right zoning. Municipalities also could implement transfer of development rights programs and obtain authority to levy impact fees to pay for infrastructure improvements. Regional plans could establish minimum performance standards and a regional planning analysis.

Cities and towns also can participate in voluntary regional compacts. The example of the Town of Bedford, a community of 12,595 population fifteen miles northwest of Boston, illustrates the possibilities. Bedford is involved in eighteen different regional service consortia, including the North East Solid Waste Committee, Eastern Middlesex Mosquito Control District, Greater Boston Police Council, Massachusetts District 6 HAZMAT Team, Minuteman Library Network, Educational Collaborative of Greater Boston, and Salt Purchasing Collaborative. Every other municipality participates in similar consortia.

Cooperative municipal services were the core recommendation of Mayor Menino's 1997 Regionalization Commission. The report stated: "One of the greatest structural impediments to municipal fiscal health is the efficiency of providing certain municipal services on a small scale." MAPC has created collective purchasing consortia serving forty municipalities. They provide group health insurance, materials purchasing, and common municipal management training. The Telecom City project offers another model. Medford, Malden, and Everett have pooled adjoining parcels to create a large site for technology businesses. These municipalities will share the tax revenues, and the job creation benefit will extend to a larger area.

Neighborhood and community-based organizations have contributed to a regional dialogue on affordable housing, economic development, education and job training, crime prevention, human services, and citizen advocacy. The Greater Boston Interfaith Organization has successfully pressured state legislative leaders to create a trust fund for affordable housing development. This grassroots activity is critical to promoting regional approaches to key issues. Environmental justice advocates have likewise pushed for improvements to the regional transit system. Though these endeavors often fall beneath the regional radar, regionalists should make every effort to recruit community activists to work on their issues on a broader regional basis.

Developing a Regional Mindset

Regionalism is not an end unto itself. It is a tool for better understanding and tackling problems of Greater Boston. Regional government is not necessary, but policy-makers do need a regional state of mind. The state, local communities, and non-profit agencies can tackle regional growth management or economic development without necessarily creating new regional agencies.

A regional sense of shared history and culture is essential for regional policy-making. It entails a conversation about the "regional story," an analysis of issues, and an institutional arrangement for convening regional interests to develop policy initiatives.

The Cape Cod Commission is a leader in strong regional planning. Regionalism has flourished on Cape Cod in recent years because of its coherent geography, a long-standing cultural identity, and the fact it has only fifteen towns. The Commission, which is a department of Barnstable County, provides a regional forum for determining growth management and environmental protection policies and regulates large development projects. Barnstable County itself convenes regional committees dealing with human services, public health, and economic development. Also operating on a regional scale are the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce, Cape Cod

Technology Council, Cape Cod HOME Council, and Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority. One of the most innovative regional collaborations is the Cape Light Compact, which represents the twenty-one towns of Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard in purchasing electric power and energy conservation. Despite New England-style local authority and conflicts over regional governance, Cape towns use regional entities when they are a more effective way to get things done.

Counties in western Massachusetts have relatively strong regional identities and common interests because of geographically coherent regions and shared histories. Both Franklin and Hampshire have recently transformed their county governments into Regional Councils of Government. The Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council provides strategic leadership and one-stop shopping for economic development for the three Pioneer Valley counties.

Greater Boston possesses the building blocks of a more intense regional identity. People are proud of Boston's history, the sports teams, the historic landmarks, the specific communities where they live and work, the cutting-edge Information Age Economy. Yet Boston's past, its hidebound ways, and political and social resentments also create a burden.

Historic organizations could tell the story of the region through histories, guidebooks, walking tours, exhibits, and special events. The Essex Heritage Area and the Blackstone Valley Heritage Corridor have organized heritage events and trails to increase historic awareness in their regions. It might make sense in explaining Greater Boston to focus on distinct town centers, famous institutions like colleges, distinctive natural landmarks like the Blue Hills Reservation, the Bay Circuit greenbelt and walking trail, and the highway and transit systems that tie the region together.

To develop a wider audience, the media must be engaged more effectively. The print media, particularly *The Boston Globe*, report on regional studies, conferences, and policy proposals; but a regional mindset does not characterize media approaches to reporting. Community-based papers—such as the *Quincy Patriot-Ledger*, *Brockton Enterprise*, *Salem Evening News*, *Lowell Sun*, or the Community Newspapers chain of weeklies—tend to focus strictly on their community's news, but they could be useful in telling how their community is participating in a regional project.

Boston magazine promotes a regional point of view with its coverage of cultural and political issues. The magazine's regular ranking of regional communities by house prices or educational attainment provides a sense of how status, class, and consumerism fragment the communities that make up the region.

Television news is weak at reporting public policy, but it does communicate a shared sense of popular culture by celebrating professional sports teams, especially the Red Sox. The Boston Marathon, coursing through eight communities, is one of America's great regional spectacles. Museums, theaters, music groups, colleges, restaurants, and recreational venues and reporting about them also provide a shared sense of the region to local residents.

Talk programs on public television, such as WGBH's "Greater Boston" with Emily Rooney, or local radio programs, such as "The Connection" or "The David Brudnoy Show," could pick up on the policy topics of regionalism if a deliberate effort were organized to raise public consciousness about regionalism. Specific regional issues like growth management and affordable housing receive media attention when there is controversy and could become subjects of further discussion.

Scale poses a difficult problem for understanding Greater Boston as a region. Although the proper sphere of action and analysis is often the entire region, sometimes a smaller sub-region, such as the I-495 Corridor or the South Shore, is more effective at engaging citizens' loyalties. Most people live their lives in about a half dozen communities. Regionalists need to focus on both the Greater Boston region and its many sub-regions through publications, projects, and policy initiatives.

A Strategic Regionalism for Greater Boston

The early twenty-first century poses a unique moment in the history of Greater Boston. Problems of growth are forcing the region to look at new solutions. Many realize that regionalism is the underlying leitmotif of our economy and quality of life. The regional initiatives of competing metropolitan areas across the country are pushing Boston to consider undertaking similar efforts.

Regional strategies for issues like transportation, the environment, housing, and economic development could offer a powerful approach to protect and shape the region's treasured local communities. Smart regionalism can provide new tools for harnessing development and achieving the quality of life people desire. Already, dense networks of organizations in Greater Boston are struggling to find new ways of understanding regional issues. The good news, as the historian Sam Bass Warner, Jr. suggests in his new work *Greater Boston*, is that the traditions of the Puritan congregation and the self-governing town meeting have created more vital local communities than exist elsewhere in the country.¹⁰

The challenge is to find distinctively Bostonian approaches to weave those localities into common cause when regional approaches make sense.

Greater Boston's cities and towns have been unenthusiastic about creating new unelected, bureaucratic bodies like the public regional authorities of a century ago. This stems from the era's skepticism about politics and big government as well as from a desire for local, democratic control. Citizens ask what regionalism can do for them. Greater Boston cannot mimic the strategies of other regions, but it might fashion a strategic regionalism that builds on the strengths of local identity and action. Regionalism should not be pursued for its own sake, but to solve pressing problems that can be solved no other way.

The dozens of organizations participating in the Boston Society of Architects' Civic Initiative indicate that an active regional debate has commenced. Perhaps a new model of regionalism is evolving in which various interest groups, communities, and government agencies coalesce around specific issues. Since many believe the era of "big government" is over, what might be called a "thousand points of light" approach might offer a workable model of regionalism for our time.

To develop the model requires gathering around a common "table" or set of tables to continue the rich conversations that have already begun. The conversations could clarify the roles of everyone from the state to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council to the region's businesses, universities, grassroots groups, and foundations. Together, participants cannot only tell their common and diverging stories of regionalism, but script new stories for the next generation.