

# Minutes of the GOVERNOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE

Monday, September 14, 2020 | 2:00 p.m.

## Committee Members Present:

Mary Liz Holberg, Peter Bell, Patrick Born, John (Jay) Cowles, James Hovland, Elizabeth Kautz, Douglas Loon, Mary Jo McGuire, Khani Sahebjam, George Schember, Alene Tchourumoff, Thomas Weaver, Janet Williams, Zhirong (Jerry) Zhao

## Committee Members Absent:

Pahoua Yang Hoffman

## CALL TO ORDER

Committee Chair Mary Liz Holberg called the meeting of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Committee to order at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, September 14, 2020.

## INFORMATION

1. Historical background of the Metropolitan Council; State and Federal Statutory Responsibilities (Deb Dyson, Legislative Analyst, House Research)

Deb Dyson, Legislative Analyst, House Research, shared background information about the Metropolitan Council, including governance issues and proposals, as a way of giving historical context to the committee's work. The Governor's executive order establishing the Blue Ribbon Committee states that the committee is to review: 1. The role elected versus appointed Metropolitan Council members; 2. The Metropolitan Council's role as a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and identify and evaluate the ways the federal designation map complement and conflict with the Council responsibilities under Minnesota law; and 3. The effectiveness of the delivery of regional transit services.

The Metropolitan Council is a political subdivision of the state, with jurisdiction in seven metropolitan counties with 56 percent of the state's population. The functions of the Council are planning and coordination, operations of regional services: transit, wastewater collection and treatment; and passthrough funding for: Metro Housing Redevelopment Authority (HRA), parks and open space, and MLCA. While transportation is a significant and important function for the Council, it is not the only Council function to take into consideration when looking at the Council's governance structure.

The Metropolitan Council began in 1957 with the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission. In 1967 the issues emerged of wastewater, transportation and federal requirements for the region. In 1967 the Legislature established the Council as an appointed body and in the same year established the Metropolitan Transit Commission to take over failing private bus service. In 1994 the Metropolitan Government Reorganization act was passed and the two were merged. Since 1995, many years see bills introduced to study governance, abolish the Council, make the Council a state agency, make the Council an elected body or a Council of Government (COG), change who makes appointments, or split off a function.

Committee members had questions about the Legislature's role in overseeing the Council and Council budgets, including the local and federal shares of the Metropolitan Council budget. Committee members also had a question about if there has been a governor who has ever championed changes to the Met Council, including moving to elected officials. While there have been governors with an interest in making changes to the Council structure, there has not been a governor with an interest in moving to an elected Council. Committee members also asked about the process of appointing Council members and if

there have been changes made to the appointment process. Some changes have been made in the past to the appointment process.

2. How does the Council deliver its statutory responsibilities?

a. Community Development (Lisa Barajas, Director, Community Development)

The purpose of the Community Development division is to oversee the regional planning process and the 10-year regional planning cycle. Community development is also responsible for planning and funding the regional parks planning process, in coordination with local park agencies. Community Development also oversees the Metropolitan Livable Communities Act programs, to create compact and connected development patterns, help to change long-term market incentives that adversely impact the creation and preservation of living wage jobs, create incentives for developing communities to include a full range of housing opportunities, and to create incentives to preserve and rehabilitate affordable housing. This program is fully funded by the local tax levy. Community Development operates the Metro Housing and Redevelopment Authority (Metro HRA), which was created by the Minnesota Legislature in 1974 to administer rent subsidy. The Metro HRA is the largest administrator of tenant-based rental assistance in the state. Finally, Community Development provides research on regional issues.

b. Metropolitan Transportation Services (Nick Thompson, Director, Metropolitan Transportation Services)

Metropolitan Transportation Services (MTS) is responsible for planning, transit operations and grants. MTS serves as the region's federally required Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and performs long-range transportation system planning for all modes. The Council's designation as the MPO will be revisited in greater depth at a later meeting. MTS is responsible for transit operations, providing contracting and coordination for metropolitan transit operations. MTS also provides financial assistance to local transit providers. MTS also administers transportation grants to local agencies and transit operators. MTS is the designated planning agency per both state and federal law. The MTS family of transit services includes fixed route, Metro Mobility ADA service, Metro Mobility non-ADA service, Transit Link and Metro Vanpool. MTS also provides regional services including fleet for regional services, technology, grants management, regional policy, regional provider performance reporting, and support of suburban transit providers.

c. Metro Transit (Wes Kooistra, General Manager, Metro Transit)

Metro Transit provided over 84 percent of the nearly 92 million transit rides regionwide in 2019. The Metro Transit service area covers 907 square miles and 90 cities. In 2019 125 routes were used to provide transit service. The last travel inventory showed that approximately 60 percent of trips are for work or school. Bus is about two-thirds of all rides. 2020 ridership has been very different from 2019 ridership levels, over 50 percent down overall. Kooistra also shared information about the funding structure for both operations and capital development. Committee members had a question about opt-outs, which are cities that have opted out of Metro Transit services.

d. Environmental Services (Leisa Thompson, General Manager, Environmental Services)

The key role of Environmental Services is to operate the regional wastewater treatment system. Environmental Services also carries out the water supply planning activities required under Minnesota Statute. Environmental Services serves approximately 50 percent of Minnesota's population. The majority of the funding comes from municipal wastewater charges, with smaller funding coming from the Sewer Availability Charge and Industrial Waste Charges. As the water supply planning authority, Environmental Services develops the guide for the orderly, economical development of the metropolitan

area, and protects public health and water quality. Environmental Services also operates the Metro Area Water Supply Advisory Committee (MAWSAC). MAWSAC assists and guides Council water supply planning and approves the Master Water Supply Plan. A committee member had a question about pricing for industrial waste charges and asked if the Council makes a profit. Thompson stated that this is based on the estimated cost for the service and program.

### 3. Regional Governance Models (Lisa Barajas, Director, Community Development)

Lisa Barajas shared an overview of different models of regional governance. Councils of government (COGs) are the most common form of regional government. A COG is a voluntary member organization of local governments that plays a coordination role and/or addresses regional issues. Other common models are MPOs, regional development authorities (RDA), and regional planning agencies (RPA). Many organizations are a combination of more than one form of regional government and are located somewhere on the spectrum from voluntary to a state or federally delegated authority.

### 4. Committee Discussion

Committee members had no further discussion.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Bridget Toskey  
Recording Secretary