

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: METROPOLITAN COUNCIL REFORM PRINCIPLES

**1) Why now?**

Reform of the Metropolitan Council has been an issue on the minds of many local governments for many years. However, political realities have created obstacles that thwarted many previous attempts at reform.

The release of ThriveMSP2040 reinvigorated the drive for reform in many cities and counties who were unhappy with aspects of the plan. However, our call for change is not a reaction to the specifics of the plan, or to how it allocates resources. Instead, the experience drove home what little incentive the Council has to take into account the opinions of local governments. Councilmembers do not answer to the local constituency, but rather to a constituency of one: the Governor. We realized this was the core problem, and the release of Thrive2040 was the catalyst that renewed our efforts to build a coalition for governance reform.

**2) Who makes up the coalition?**

The coalition originated with officials from Anoka, Carver, Dakota, and Scott Counties, who share a collective opinion that the Metropolitan Council must be more accountable to the regional constituency. They made the decision to develop principles for reform, and, knowing it was important to have the perspective of cities represented as well, invited certain city officials with interest in reform to join the group. The city officials (listed in Attachment A) represent themselves alone, and do not necessarily represent the views of their entire councils. Together this group developed a mutually-agreed-upon set of principles for reform.

**3) You're asking cities to adopt these principles, knowing that they go against the position of Metro Cities. Doesn't this undermine the work of the Metro Cities organization?**

We believe that Metro Cities plays a vital role in advocating for city interests, and we did invite them to play a part in the development of the shared principles. However, they ultimately decided to withdraw from the group due the incompatibility of our positions. We had hoped to work together toward reform, and we hope to work together in the future if the position of the organization changes.

However, in the meantime we are aware of many cities with positions on Metropolitan Council reform that contradict the official Metro Cities position, and we believe that those cities should have their voices heard in the Legislature.

**4) What are the next steps?**

These draft principles have been distributed to every city and county in the metropolitan area, and we hope to have as many as possible adopt these principles. We are happy to discuss the principles, along with our reasons for wanting reform, with any Board or Council in the area.

During the Legislative Session we will present these adopted resolutions to Legislators to illustrate how important reform is to local governments in the metro-area, and we will work with Legislators to advance reform proposals that meet the adopted principles.

**5) How do other cities do it?**

Every other major metropolitan area's regional planning organization (see Attachment B), as well as every other regional planning organization in Minnesota, is made up of a majority of local elected officials.

**6) Is this an effort to get rid of the Metropolitan Council?**

Absolutely not. Regional governance is important, but it would be more effective and credible with local representation. In the current system, Metropolitan Council members are non-elected individuals answerable only to the Governor, an office that has often been elected without majority support from metropolitan-area voters. The Council, which has the ability to levy taxes on metropolitan-area residents, should be answerable to the citizens and taxpayers of the area it represents rather than a single officeholder and should feature strong county representation from local elected officials.

**7) Is this a reaction to the ThriveMSP2040 plan?**

No. Many cities and counties were unhappy with aspects of the Council's plan. However, our call for reform is not a reaction to the specifics of the plan, or to how it allocates resources. Instead, the experience drove home to many what little incentive the Council has to take into account the opinions of local governments. The Council does not answer to the local constituency, but rather to a constituency of one- the Governor. We realized that this was the core problem, and the release of Thrive2040 was the catalyst to renew our efforts to build a coalition for governance reform.

**8) Is there other support for this?**

Yes, many other entities and organizations have come out in support for reform. In 2011, for example, the Office of the Legislative Auditor released [a report](#) recommending that the Metropolitan Council be composed of a majority elected officials, citing the Council's "limited credibility" due to a governance structure that limits accountability.

The City of Minneapolis also passed a resolution on January 14, 2011, asking the Legislature to reform the Council so that a “majority of council members shall be locally elected city and county officials.”

Furthermore, representatives of the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, responsible for certifying the Council as eligible to receive federal transportation and transit funding, have encouraged reform of the Council to make it “more directly accountable to its public.”

**9) Would these principles turn the Metropolitan Council into a Council of Governments (COG)?**

No. Councils of Governments have little authority beyond transportation planning and regional coordination of service. The level of authority that the Legislature has granted the Metropolitan Council, including the authority to levy taxes, is unique. None of the proposed principles diminish Council authority in any way, and will not transform the Council into a COG.

**10) Do you oppose the Governor?**

No. This is not a partisan issue- we would feel the same way whether the Governor was a Republican or a Democrat. What troubles us is that the entire membership and focus of the Council can shift depending on who is in power. The Council should represent the interests of the region, not a single individual.

**11) Is this about the suburbs complaining?**

No. This is about ensuring that the entire region feels represented by the Metropolitan Council.

**12) Is the Met Council accountable to their constituents?**

No. Although the Met Council has the power to levy taxes on metropolitan area residents, it is not accountable to those residents and is instead solely accountable to the Governor, an individual that over the last five election cycles was only once elected with majority support from metro-area voters.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PRINCIPLES THEMSELVES:

### **13) Aren't local elected officials too busy to serve on the Council?**

There is a time commitment to serving on the Council, true, but it is only a part-time engagement. Many current Metropolitan Council members hold other full-time jobs. Furthermore, local elected officials serve on the metropolitan planning organizations of every other large city in the country.

If these principles are enacted it will be part of cities and counties' role to ensure that those appointed to the Council are comfortable with the time commitment.

### **14) Isn't it a conflict of interest to ask an official elected by one specific city or county to represent an entire region?**

Local elected officials already serve in many capacities where they must consider regional interests. The Council's Transportation Advisory Board, for example, which recommends allocation of transportation and transit funding throughout the region, is made up of majority of local elected officials. The Counties Transit Improvement Board and the Metropolitan Mosquito Control District Board are two other examples where local elected officials serve and represent the interests of an entire region. Even the structure of County Boards and City Councils requires local elected officials to represent the interests of the entire city/county, rather than the specific district that elected them.

### **15) What happens if a local elected official leaves office in the middle of his/her Metropolitan Council appointment?**

We purposely made these principles high-level. We do not want to get into the details of a specific plan; that is the job of the Legislature. These issues will be considered as a plan develops.

### **16) What about the criticisms of the role of the Council? These principles don't address any of that.**

True, and many of us do have thoughts on the role of the Council. However, we believe that the first step is to reform the governance of the Council. Once the Council is accountable to its metropolitan constituency we can consider the role that it should play in the region's future.

### **17) You mention a system of voting and checks and balances- can you elaborate?**

We purposely made these principles high-level. We do not want to get into the details of a specific plan; that is the job of the Legislature. However, we do believe that the Council should represent all citizens in the area, without allowing the large urban core to drive all decision making.

## ATTACHMENT A: PARTICIPANTS IN THE METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUP

### ***Participating County Officials:***

Anoka County:           Commissioner Matt Look  
                                  Commissioner Scott Schulte  
                                  Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah  
                                  County Administrator Jerry Soma

Carver County:           Commissioner Randy Maluchnik  
                                  Commissioner Tom Workman  
                                  County Administrator Dave Hemze

Dakota County:           Commissioner Chris Gerlach  
                                  Commissioner Nancy Schouweiler  
                                  Commissioner Liz Workman  
                                  County Manager Brandt Richardson

Scott County:            Commissioner Mike Beard  
                                  Commissioner Jon Ulrich  
                                  County Administrator Gary Shelton

### ***Participating City Officials:***

Bethel:                    Councilmember Brian Kirkham

Burnsville:              Councilmember Bill Coughlin

Chanhassen:             Mayor Denny Laufenburger

Elko New Market:       Mayor Bob Crawford

Jordan:                  Councilmember Mike Franklin

Lino Lakes:              Mayor Jeff Reinert

Prior Lake:              Mayor Ken Hedberg

Rosemount:              Councilmember Jeff Weisensel

Shakopee:               Mayor Bill Mars

## Metropolitan Planning Agencies in Large Metropolitan Areas

Name	Governance Structure
<a href="#">San Diego Association of Governments</a>	<p>The Board includes 20 local elected officials as well as non-voting members from various state and federal agencies and other organizations.</p> <p><b>Summary: All voting members are local elected officials. There are no citizen members.</b></p>
<a href="#">Metropolitan Council</a>	<p>The Council consists of 16 citizens appointed by the Governor.</p> <p><b>Summary: All voting members are citizens. There are no elected officials on the Council.</b></p>
<a href="#">North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority</a>	<p>The Board consists of 15 local elected officials, 4 other government representatives, and 1 citizen representative (position is currently vacant).</p> <p>The 3 other government representatives are from the Port Authority, the NJ Governor's Authorities Unit, NJ Department of Transportation, and NJ TRANSIT.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are local elected officials. There is one citizen member.</b></p>
<a href="#">Metropolitan Transportation Commission (Oakland CA)</a>	<p>The Board consists of 16 local elected officials, 2 representatives of the federal government, 1 representative of state government, and 2 representatives of local organizations.</p> <p>The state representative is from the California State Transportation Agency.</p> <p>The 1 organizations are the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission and the Association of Bay Area Governments.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are local elected officials. There are no citizen members.</b></p>
<a href="#">Houston-Galveston Area Council</a>	<p>The Board consists of 30 local elected officials, 6 judges, and 1 representative of the Independent School Districts.</p> <p>The local elected officials represent cities and counties in the metro area, although some cities and counties are represented by judges.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are local elected officials. There are no citizen members.</b></p>

## Metropolitan Planning Agencies in Large Metropolitan Areas

Name	Governance Structure
<a href="#">North Central Texas Council of Governments</a>	<p>The Board consists of 9 local elected officials, 3 judges, and a non-voting member of the Texas Legislature.</p> <p>The metro-area cities are represented by mayors or councilmembers; the counties are represented by judges.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are local elected officials (although there are no county elected officials- counties are represented by judges). There are no citizen members.</b></p>
<a href="#">Boston Region MPO</a>	<p>The Board consists of 14 local elected officials, 8 representatives from other governments and organizations, and 2 nonvoting representatives from the federal government.</p> <p>The elected officials are all mayors and selectmen of local towns; there are no county representatives.</p> <p>There are 2 representatives from regional planning organizations, as well as representatives from regional transit and transportation authorities and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of the voting members are local elected officials. There are also no citizen members.</b></p>
<a href="#">Atlanta Regional Commission</a>	<p>The Board consists of 23 local elected officials, 15 citizens, and 1 non-voting representative from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.</p> <p>There is 1 citizen representative from each of 15 districts in the metro area, elected by the 23 public officials.</p> <p><b>Summary: All voting members are either local elected officials or are citizen members selected by local elected officials.</b></p>
<a href="#">Puget Sound Regional Council</a>	<p>The Council has a general assembly consisting of all elected officials from all member jurisdictions. The Assembly establishes the budget and elects representatives to the Executive Board.</p> <p>The Executive Board consists of 30 elected officials and 2 representatives from the Washington State Transportation Commission and the Washington State Department of Transportation.</p> <p><b>Summary: All voting members are either local elected officials or are selected by local elected officials. There are no citizen members.</b></p>

## Metropolitan Planning Agencies in Large Metropolitan Areas

Name	Governance Structure
<a href="#">National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board</a>	<p>The Board consists of 32 local elected officials and 2 representatives from state government.</p> <p>The 2 state representatives are legislators from the Maryland and Virginia General Assemblies.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are elected officials. There are no citizen members.</b></p>
<a href="#">Maricopa Association of Governments</a>	<p>The Council consists of 32 local elected officials, 4 state representatives, and 1 member of a citizen organization.</p> <p>The elected officials are mayors, councilmembers, etc. from metro towns, cities, and reservations.</p> <p>There are also 2 representatives each from the State Transportation Board and the Arizona Department of Transportation.</p> <p>Finally, there is a representative from the Citizens Transportation Oversight Commission.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are local elected officials. There is one citizen member, a representative of a citizen oversight commission.</b></p>
<a href="#">Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission</a>	<p>The Executive Committee consists of 11 local elected officials, 3 at-large members, and representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Economic Development, Department of Transportation, and Governor's Office.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are local elected officials. There are 3 at-large members.</b></p>
<a href="#">Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission</a>	<p>The Board consists of 16 state government appointees, 24 local government elected officials and staff, and 2 attorneys. as well as a number of non-voting members.</p> <p>There are 4 representatives from the PA Department of Transportation and 3 from the NJ Department of Transportation.</p> <p>There are also 3 representatives from the PA Governor's Policy Office, 1 other PA Governor's appointee, 3 from the NJ Department of Community Affairs, and 2 appointees from the NJ Governor.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are either local elected officials or local government staff members. There are no citizen members.</b></p>



## Metropolitan Planning Agencies in Large Metropolitan Areas

Name	Governance Structure
<a href="#">New York Metropolitan Transportation Council</a>	<p>The Board consists of 5 local elected officials, 3 city representatives, 1 state representative, and 7 non-voting members from various federal and state agencies.</p> <p>The 5 local elected officials are the County Executives of the 5 metro counties. The city representatives are heads of the New York City Transportation Authority, Department of Transportation, and Department of City Planning.</p> <p>The state representative is from the New York State Department of Transportation.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are local elected officials or representatives from city government. There are no citizen members.</b></p>
<a href="#">Baltimore Regional Transportation Board</a>	<p>The Board consists of 7 local elected officials and 4 representatives from state departments (3 non-voting).</p> <p>A representative from the Maryland Department of Transportation has voting privileges.</p> <p><b>Summary: All voting members, except one, are local elected officials.</b></p>
<a href="#">Southeast Michigan Council of Governments</a>	<p>The Council has a general assembly consisting of delegates from all local governments in the region. The Executive Committee consists of local elected officials as well as representatives from community colleges and the Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are local elected officials. There are no citizen members.</b></p>
<a href="#">Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning</a>	<p>The Board consists of appointments from each of the metro counties- the members are a combination of elected officials and representatives of nonprofits and private industry. There are also 2 non-voting Governor's appointees and a non-voting representative of the Regional Transportation Authority.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are elected officials and all are appointed by local jurisdictions. There is a Citizens' Advisory Committee created by the Board.</b></p>
<a href="#">Southern California Association of Governments</a>	<p>The Regional Council consists of elected local officials representing 67 districts, all members of the Los Angeles City Council and the Mayor, as well as 1 elected representative from each of the 6 counties in the district, and representatives from regional transportation commissions and tribal governments.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are local elected officials. There are no citizen members.</b></p>

## Metropolitan Planning Agencies in Minnesota

Name	Governance Structure
<a href="#">Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council</a>	<p>The Board consists of 15 local elected officials from Minnesota and Wisconsin, 2 citizens, and one representative from the Duluth Transit Authority.</p> <p>There are two citizen members, one representing the City of Duluth and one the City of Superior.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are local elected officials. There are two citizen representatives.</b></p>
<a href="#">Grand Forks - East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization</a>	<p>The Board consists of 6 local elected officials as well as 2 representatives from the Planning Commissions of the City of Grand Forks and the City of East Grand Forks.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are local elected officials. There are no citizen representatives.</b></p>
<a href="#">Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council</a>	<p>The Board consists of 11 elected officials and 3 representatives from the Fargo and Moorhead Planning Commissions.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are elected officials. There are no citizen representatives.</b></p>
<a href="#">St. Cloud Area Planning Organization</a>	<p>The Board consists of 11 local elected officials as well as representatives from the Central Minnesota Transportation Alliance and St. Cloud Metro Bus.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are elected officials. There are no citizen representatives.</b></p>
<a href="#">Metropolitan Council</a>	<p>The Council consists of 16 citizens appointed by the Governor.</p> <p><b>Summary: All voting members are citizens. There are no elected officials on the Council.</b></p>
<a href="#">Rochester-Olmsted Council of Governments</a>	<p>The Board consists of 16 local elected officials, including 2 representatives from school districts, and 2 citizen members.</p> <p><b>Summary: The majority of voting members are elected officials. There are two citizen representatives.</b></p>
<a href="#">La Crosse Area Planning Committee</a>	<p>The Board consists of 10 local elected officials.</p> <p><b>Summary: All voting members are elected officials. There are no citizen representatives.</b></p>
<a href="#">Mankato/North Mankato Area Planning Organization</a>	<p>The Board is made up of 6 local elected officials.</p> <p><b>Summary: All voting members are elected officials. There are no citizen representatives.</b></p>