

Metropolitan Governance Reform
Twin Cities' Local Government Coalition
-Statement of Objectives-

A coalition of local governments throughout the metropolitan area has joined together to develop a position statement and a set of principles for improving metropolitan governance in the Twin Cities.

The Coalition supports the need for regional planning, collaboration and coordination, but seeks to expand local government representation on the Metropolitan Council.

The Coalition's objectives for its collective effort to improved governance are:

1. To articulate a vision of responsive and effective metropolitan governance—as represented by a Statement of Belief and Principles for Reform of the Metropolitan Council
2. To align local government interests behind a reform effort—through formation of a broad coalition of metropolitan Cities and Counties —and a common position.
3. To be prepared for any efforts—legislative and otherwise—to reform the governance structure and functioning of the Metropolitan Council.

Attached is the Coalition's Statement of Belief and Principles for Reform.

Twin Cities' Local Government Coalition

Principles for Metropolitan Council Reform

The following principles were developed by a coalition of cities and counties in the metropolitan area, a coalition created to advocate for reform of the Metropolitan Council. The group believes that an effective Metropolitan Council should reflect the following principles, which were developed based on the group's core Statement of Belief (printed below).

STATEMENT OF BELIEF:

The Metropolitan Council, due to its taxing and policy authority, should be accountable to a regional constituency of those impacted by its decisions. It should not operate as a state agency—as it does in its current form—answerable to only one person, the Governor.

Principles for Metropolitan Council Reform:

- I. A majority of the members of the Metropolitan Council shall be elected officials, appointed from cities and counties within the region.
- II. Metropolitan cities shall directly control the appointment process for city representatives to the Metropolitan Council.
- III. Metropolitan counties shall directly appoint their own representatives to the Metropolitan Council.
- IV. The terms of office for any Metropolitan Council members appointed by the Governor shall be staggered and not coterminous with the Governor.
- V. Membership on the Metropolitan Council shall include representation from every metropolitan county government.
- VI. The Metropolitan Council shall represent the entire region, therefore voting shall be structured based on population and incorporate a system of checks and balances.

Background and Justification of Position

The Metropolitan Council was created to provide for the orderly and economic development of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. It has the responsibility and authority to guide the region's growth and to provide important regional services. The Counties of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, and Scott support the concept of a regional approach, and have no wish to abolish the Council or diminish the importance of regional collaboration.

However, the Council's management of growth, and in particular the coordination and delivery of regional services has changed dramatically. At the same time, the role of counties has evolved. Increasingly, Counties have undertaken direct provision of regional services including: hazardous and solid waste management, transit funding and transitway development, regional parks, regional highways, water resources planning and watershed management, greenway and bikeway development, farmland and open space preservation, the regional library system, fiber communications networks, and the 800 MHz radio network.

The Council's recent focus on reducing poverty and disparities makes it even more essential that within the governance structure there is understanding and improved coordination with county programs--- which exclusively provide economic assistance, social services, workforce development/employment, counseling, public health, nutrition and family "home visiting" services, workforce and specialized housing programs and many other anti-poverty and human services. In these and many other circumstances, the State, Metropolitan Council and city governments have all looked to counties to provide both the financial and political leadership needed to address key regional issues.

Thus, while a strong regional approach is necessary for many issues, it is necessary for the regional governing body to feature strong county representation, as well as representation from other local elected officials. Currently, the members of the Council 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.

The best way to ensure that the interests of citizens of the metropolitan-area are represented is to have a preponderance of locally elected officials on the Council--individuals that do not serve exclusively at the pleasure of the Governor. This will have the added benefit of allowing the Council to meet federal guidelines to serve as the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization, a move encouraged by Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Federal Highway Administration (FHA) to make the Council "more directly accountable to its public¹."

Regional governance is vital to the metropolitan area's continued success. However, in order for a regional body to be effective it must be credible, meaning that regional citizens must feel that the body effectively represents their goals and values. Citizens currently feel disconnected from the Metropolitan Council, preventing it from functioning as an effective regional governance body. The coalition of suburban counties is working to join the Metropolitan Council with the people it represents, so the region as a whole can unite for continued growth and prosperity.

¹ Letter from representatives of FTA and FHA to Ann R. Goering of Ratwik, Roszak, & Maloney, P.A., Aug. 3 2015