

4

S T R A T E G Y F O U R

Build Regional Collaboration

Summary

Adopted in 2008, MetroFuture is Greater Boston's long term regional plan. The foundation of the plan is a well-defined vision for the region. Thirteen implementation strategies were included to support progress towards the vision. An extensive community engagement process ensured that MAPC constructed the vision and strategies from the hopes and dreams of the region. In anticipation of an update to the regional plan, MAPC is evaluating the extent to which regional actors, either intentionally or unintentionally, implemented these strategies. The authors gathered the information that follows through conversations with MAPC staff and content experts.

The intent of the 4th strategy, [Build Regional Collaboration](#), was a response to Metro Boston limited efforts to work collaboratively across municipal boundaries to take collective action. While there are a number of regional entities such as the MBTA and the MWRA, most programs, policy, projects, and initiatives are either at the local or state level. With so many regional systems and markets, such as housing, the economy, watersheds, and transportation, greater regional collaboration will be necessary to address our shared challenges and to meet the opportunities.

Strategy #4 offered recommendations meant to encourage and support municipalities towards regional collaboration and consolidation. As a regional planning agency, the Metropolitan Planning Committee (MAPC) is uniquely positioned to provide that encouragement and support. Therefore, this strategy recommended that the state government strengthen MAPC as a regional resource. Increasing MAPC's and other regional entities' capacity would increase opportunities for regional collaboration and in doing so create a path towards increased safety and robust regional development.

This strategy recommended the two things. First, Strategy #4 suggested that the state incentivize regional collaboration. In 2016 the state created the Efficiency and Regionalization grant program, which offered financial support for governmental entities to regionalize services. Under the Patrick Administration, the state funded Land Use Priority Plans, developed in partnership with municipalities, RPAs, state agencies, and stakeholders. The plans identify, at a local, regional and state level, places which are appropriate for growth and preservation, known as Priority Development Areas and Priority Preservation Areas (PDA/PPAs). The Municipal Modernization Bill also prioritized regional applications for existing grant funds and established a joint powers act that would further enable regionalization initiatives through a streamlined process. While these opportunities mark progress along the path towards collaboration, a more decisive, better funded regional mandate by state, would greatly hasten our pace. The second recommendation was increase the capacity of Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs). MAPC member communities increased their assessment that provides grants under the Planning for MetroFuture Technical Assistance (PMTA) program. And the state has consistently funded District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA), which allow MAPC to provide technical assistance to municipalities consistent with MetroFuture's vision. Additional funding sources, like the Community Compact and Efficiency and Regionalization Grants, further increased MAPC's capacity and reach. The Legislature passed the Municipal Modernization

Bill which both allowed state agencies to contract with RPAs for municipal services and technical assistance

In the presence of consistent and in some cases increased state funding, MAPC significantly expanded staff and the amount of projects undertaken each year. Equally important was MAPC's ability to fundraise outside of traditional RPA funding sources. The Sustainable Communities grant from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and significant support from foundations allowed MAPC to greatly expand its impact and in doing so the potential of realizing MetroFuture's vision. MAPC was able to launch a variety of new practice areas in Clean Energy, Public Health, and Arts and Culture. Within established practice areas like land use and transportation planning, MAPC developed expertise in urban design, neighborhood change, and community engagement. While MAPC became a stronger regional resource, there is still room for municipalities to utilize MAPC more often and to more frequently implement the plans MAPC creates with them.

Many municipalities took part in the previously mentioned funding opportunities and in doing so worked with their municipal neighbors to plan and implement collaboratively. There were also cases of municipalities collaborating proactively. The North Suffolk Public Health Collaborative seeks collective, multi-disciplinary solutions to systemic health issues. Municipalities also took collaborative approaches to emergency planning efforts and implementation for emergency preparedness, hazard mitigation, and climate change. Many of the same entities also pursued regional greenway, park, and trail planning. MetroFuture recommended more ambitious collaborations and even consolidations of municipal services. However, municipal consolidation and even top-down approaches to municipal efficiency are unpopular. The belief is that improvement will come more from efficient coordination rather than from consolidation.

Sub-Strategy Review

Sub-Strategy A: Strengthen MAPC as a regional resource

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS

- MAPC advocacy resulted in additional grant programs and increased grant funding now available for municipal technical assistance: the Planning for MetroFuture Technical Assistance (PMTA); Direct Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) increased; and the Community Compact and Efficiency & Regionalization Grant were created.
- MAPC staff, areas of expertise, and departments grew, including the addition of Clean Energy, Arts and Culture, and Public Health.
- The Baker administration revised regulations to provide clear, uniform authority allowing state agencies to contract with RPAs in the Municipal Modernization Bill, which was passed in June 2016.
- MAPC sub-regions created collaborative opportunities including:
 - Vetting ideas on legislation, including zoning reform and lowering speed limits;
 - Giving MAPC a venue to provide information on grant opportunities, state funding, and programs that the communities can access;
 - Collaborations and information sharing within communities, e.g. a Hazmat day among SWAP municipalities; and
 - Discrete projects such as the MAGIC Stormwater Partnership, MAGIC Climate Resilience Plan, and Regional Age-Friendly planning.

BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- Towns with limited capacity are not sending representatives to sub-regional meetings nor are they participating in regional projects because they are under-resourced and working on many other projects. MAPC and other regional entities must find a way to support these towns so they can participate, perhaps through non-municipal staff participation.

Sub-Strategy B: Support regional collaboration, purchasing, and service delivery

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:

- Opportunities for regional collaboration expanded with the passage of the [Municipal Modernization Bill](#), which prioritized regional applications for existing grant funds and established a joint powers act that would further enable regionalization initiatives through a streamlined process.
- The state launched Land Use Priority plans in which regional planning agencies, state agencies, and stakeholders, to identify, at a local, regional and state level, places which are appropriate for growth and preservation, known as [Priority Development Areas](#) and [Priority Preservation Areas](#) (PDA/PPAs).
- The [South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan](#) will reopen rail lines in southeastern Massachusetts. Governor Patrick issued an Executive Order on implementation to make investments and technical assistance (TA) consistent with the plan.
- MAPC provided \$40-\$50 million per year in sales from collective regional procurement services, instead of municipalities needing to make purchases individually and at greater cost.
- Successful regional public health entities like the North Suffolk Public Health Collaborative and the six-community North Shore/Cape Ann Public Health Collaboration were formed to connect local public health agencies, health care providers and community organizations to work collaboratively to address systemic health issues, like youth mental health and substance use disorder.
- MAPC led a regional IT project in the MAGIC region, which led the region to hire a shared network administrator.

BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- Local governments are not always willing to share services and regionalize functions; incentives for collaboration aren't strong enough, and it is often politically difficult.
- Consolidation and top-down approaches to municipal efficiency are perceived as outdated. Many believe that the issue is less about consolidation and more about efficient coordination.
- Fixed consortiums amongst sub-regional leaders, as proposed in this strategy, did not take off. The current best practice is to implement need-based collective purchasing and improve service delivery.
- Municipal mergers are an extremely contentious and politically infeasible at this time.

Sub-Strategy C: Work together to make the region better prepared for emergencies

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:

- MAPC worked with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and municipalities to coordinate and improve homeland security initiatives, aggregate purchasing of public safety equipment, and emergency response dispatch systems. Regional cache sites supported by the Northeast Regional Advisory Council (NERAC) for homeland security in Framingham, Lexington and Beverly were established and serve as a repository for equipment needed during a crisis.
- MAPC built successful collaborations around stormwater management, including the Neponset River Stormwater Collaborative.
- Several partnerships worked towards climate change resiliency, including the Metro Mayor's Climate Task Force and the MAGIC climate resiliency plan.
- The state's Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) and the MAPC-administered Shannon Community Safety Initiative (helping communities create comprehensive plans for tackling youth gun violence) were noted for helping reduce gun violence in Massachusetts; state gun homicide rates fell 35% from 2010-2015¹.

BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- Due to strict federal requirements and restrictive funding sources, Hazard Mitigation Plans for climate resilience have not been successful on a regional level, but have succeeded with 2-3 municipalities working together.
- Fire, police and public safety functions are seen as core municipal functions, which makes mergers very difficult. The unionization of public employee can also complicate proposed mergers.

Sub-Strategy D: Plan together for regional development

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:

- The Metro Mayors Housing Task Force is now working to create a regional housing production target, and then strategies for achieving this goal for 15 cities and towns in the Inner Core.
- MAPC created the concept for a regionally connected network of trails and greenways, the [LandLine](#) project, including a LandLine coalition to bring partners together and serve as a resource for discussing connections and moving forward individual projects with cities and towns to build out the network.

¹ The report "Investing in Intervention: The Critical Role of State-Level Support in Breaking the Cycle of Urban Gun Violence" by the Gifford's Law Center flagged these two public safety initiatives as critical to reducing gun violence rates.

-
- MassDOT, the MWRA, and municipalities worked together to develop trails and greenways. They studied and built regionally significant trail segments that connected communities, including a MetroWest connectivity study and opening of the aqueduct trail network.
 - MAPC created regional open space plans, including the MetroWest Open Space Plan and Lower Mystic Plan.
 - MAPC completed regional housing studies and facilitated regional collaboration in the MetroWest sub-region to encourage shared staff and services.

BARRIERS TO PROGRESS

- Few border developments were big enough to employ an advisory review processes as suggested in this strategy. The Union Point (formerly the South Weymouth Naval Air Station) redevelopment project spans three towns and included the formation of a formal commission and advisory board plus a cooperative process with financial agreements with each town. During the development of University Station in Westwood, neighboring towns were asked to comment on the process.
- This strategy recommended building a regional dispute resolution system, which did not occur, but there may be opportunities to better leverage internal MAPC staff capacity to improve regional collaboration around dispute resolution, such as community engagement training.
- Municipalities have no incentives to elevate new development proposals to the sub-regional level.

Sub-Strategy E: Share costs and benefits of development

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:

- The cities of Cambridge and Somerville were asked to contribute to the Green Line Extension project to supplement state and federal funds, which they did.
- The Municipal Modernization Bill made changes to the District Improvement Financing (DIF) statute, making it easier to calculate the revenue to be set aside for the financing, taking into account new property growth.

BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- Further research and evaluation is needed on the tax sharing recommendations in this strategy. There are few successful examples nationwide and it would be politically challenging to implement.
- Tax sharing initiatives on large developments such as the Union Point were not particularly successful due to ownership changes, zoning and land use difficulties, and the economic recession.

- Value capture is not commonly used in Massachusetts, but there are legislative proposals that would encourage this technique.
- Development impact fees, a commonly used technique in most other states that mitigates capital impacts from new development, are not authorized in Massachusetts state law. Legislation has been introduced as part of the zoning reform campaign to allow municipalities to levy reasonable impact fees after conducting a study.

Emergent Themes

- Partnerships between local governments and nongovernmental activities (hospitals, universities, institutions etc.) are promising supplements for municipal collaborations.