



# Regional Plan Association

... a research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the coordinated development of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Region.

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## NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CRITICAL NEW YORK CITY ISSUES ARE REGIONAL, KEITH TELLS CITY PLANNERS;  
URGES THEIR ATTENTION TO TRI-STATE COMMISSION, PORT AUTHORITY POLICIES

Chiding his City Planning Commission conference hosts for even questioning whether regional planning can help solve New York's problems, John P. Keith, President of Regional Plan Association, pointed to economic development, water, transportation, housing choice, parks and national urban policy as issues on which the Region from Trenton to New Haven should get together.

Dr. Keith recommended at the 40th Anniversary Conference of the City Planning Commission at Cooper Union January 18, 1979 that City officials participate more in decisions made by the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

He observed that court orders to all three states to make school finances equitable could reduce the competition between suburbs and cities for jobs that belong in the cities. If equitable school financing does not improve regional development patterns, Dr. Keith suggested, the Region might consider pooling a portion of all new industrial and commercial real estate taxes--as the Twin Cities do--and distribute them according to community need and also, perhaps, according to investment priorities set by a regional plan.

Regional Plan Association is a half-century-old citizens research and planning organization that has particularly emphasized strengthening the cities of the Tri-State New Jersey-New York-Connecticut Urban Region over the past two decades.

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Can Regional Planning Help Solve New York City's Problems?

Remarks of John P. Keith  
President, Regional Plan Association

To the 40th Anniversary Conference  
of the New York City Planning Commission

Cooper Union, January 18, 1979

Can regional planning help solve the City's problems? The way the City has put the question is indicative of the problem: How can New York City hope to solve its problems without regional planning?

The Region is an economy; not the City by itself. That's how the Committee on the Regional Plan first defined the Region more than a half century ago. That's why the boundaries were extended by another tier of counties in the 1960's.

A firm's consideration of a location is indicative. First the corporation decides whether it wants to have access to the Region's market, labor force and facilities; then it decides where in the Region to locate. It is that area of first consideration for the major corporation that tells us where the Region begins and ends. The commutershed and housing market are other measures of the Region's boundaries.

Therefore, we need an economic development strategy for the Region as a whole: then, once the firm that is being pursued chooses the Region, the sectors can compete against each other. That's not the method we have been using; instead, it has been a process of "beggar thy neighbor," steal the jobs already in the Region, one sector from another. New Jersey, by way of illustration, siphoned jobs from New York City during the Region's prosperity in the 1960's, only to lose more than that many jobs to the South and West during the 1970's recession.

The message is getting through that we're all in this economic boat together. We need to come together, particularly in talking with foreign business, to sell the New York Region. We have a potential instrument in the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. When the initial sale has been made, when a firm has chosen this Region, then the interested sectors of the Region should have equal opportunity to compete for it.

Likewise, the Region, not the City, is one big housing market. People are not constrained by municipal boundaries in their selection of housing. They make trade-offs of price, schools, journey-to-work, access to amenities, etc. The variety of the housing choices within New York City and environs needs to be made known across the country--and abroad.

We find over and over again in talking with businessmen that potential employees have a negative stereotype of living conditions in the Region. Helping to overcome that is advantageous to all. We have become a high skill, knowledge-based economy. We have to keep open the wellsprings of its replenishment, talent.

Maybe the "I love New York" campaign could be expanded to "I love to live in the New York Region," showing the varieties of housing choice available.

I recognize full well that free movement in the housing market is not open to all in the Region alike. That is another regional issue the City should be concerned about: helping enlarge the choice of location to all throughout the Region.

The basic support systems that serve the area also are regional in nature.

Water. New York City simply could not survive without the cooperation of the upstate areas from whence its water is derived and through which the water passes. But there is a mutuality of interest, because those upstate areas are served by the enormous contribution of the City in the construction and operation of the system.

Extending water lines to open new territory to development instead of using capital to rehabilitate conduits in older areas is a current regional issue on which New York City stands to gain or lose tremendously.

Transportation. It doesn't take a moment's reflection to realize how regional in character are all modes of transportation. The highway network which serves the Region and beyond is a prime example. So is public transit. It was the recognition of this regional interdependence that allowed the formation of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Certainly, the three Port Authority airports serve the whole Region.

Opening new highways which make thousands of acres accessible to new development in the hinterland is highly detrimental to existing urban areas. On the other hand, maintaining the rail network focussed on older urban centers is supportive. So, the management review of the MTA now going on is of large consequence to the City. Speedy and comfortable access to the airports from those downtown centers is important, too, as business chooses office locations. That's why issues like rail to Kennedy, taxi rates to Newark, and the like, are of vital importance to New York City. The Port Authority is conducting a mission review right now. What will it decide its role should be in the 1980's? That regional decision will greatly affect New York City.

Parks. The Region's magnificent parks were conceived in the 1929 Regional Plan as a system for the enjoyment of people throughout the area but especially for those in the older centers. The parkways were an integral part of the park experience to take people on a day's outing to parks in the country. Times have changed, and the population residing near those outlying parks is now substantial, and they have an access advantage. Consequently, the whole regional conception of parks has had to be re-thought to allow equal access to major parkland for persons in the older cities. Gateway National Recreation Area and Liberty State Park are among the results.

These several examples are enough, I am sure, to support my thesis that New York City must involve itself in regional planning. Well, then, how does it go about it?

First and foremost, the City needs to increase its attention to and presence at Tri-State Regional Planning Commission, the Region's federally recognized agency for review of federally-funded projects. This is not an issue, in the first instance at least, of more representation

from the City on Tri-State's Board. For a number of years the City neglected the opportunity to make the most of its single position on the Commission. Recently, however, at the direction of Chairman Robert Wagner, Jr., Martin Gallent, Vice Chairman of the City Planning Commission, has begun to serve ably as the City's representative. Now, the City's viewpoint is given more consideration.

Of special importance just at the moment is the impending review of Tri-State by a gubernatorially appointed Task Force. Issues of Tri-State's mode of operation, representation, and other matters of keen interest to the City are going to be thrashed out. Because this regional agency can assist or hinder the City in many ways, including finances, surveillance of the effort is imperative.

Only a short decade ago, the suburban counties of the Region were not at all sympathetic to New York City's welfare plight. Today, with Nassau, Westchester, Bergen, et. al., finding welfare among their largest expenditures, there is a new willingness to cooperate with the City in working for the federalization of welfare.

With that joint venture as an opening wedge, the City could take the initiative in convincing the suburbs that to save the cities is to save the countryside--and that these objectives are in their best interest. When the state and local governments of this Region pull in harness in their numerous national organizations and with their Congressional delegations, a real impact on urban policy could be made nationally.

Now that state school taxes are having to be equitable in the three states of the Region, the competition for tax ratables will lessen. In the wake of that change, perhaps localities will be less avaricious in fiscal zoning.

What's more, on a tri-state basis, we may just have the will to adjust our separate tax systems to eliminate the tax havens that are distorting regional location patterns.

And if that's not enough, we might experiment by pooling a percentage of all new industrial and commercial ratables in the Region--as the Twin Cities do--to help the neediest communities but also to relate public investment to a regional plan. This would make tax chasing less profitable if not downright disadvantageous. Then, development might be guided in a more rational fashion for the betterment of the Region as a whole.

The prosperity and well being of the Region is interlocked with that of the City. It is to their common advantage to plan together. Yes, you're darn right, regional planning can help solve the City's problems!