

Section 23 (b)
Task Force Report

GOVERNOR REAGAN'S 1973 TASK FORCE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXAMINED THE NEED FOR REGIONAL DECISION-MAKING SYSTEMS IN CALIFORNIA. THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS ON REGIONAL DECISION-MAKING SYSTEMS IN CALIFORNIA AND SOLUTIONS TO "REGIONAL" PROBLEMS WERE EXTRACTED FROM THE FINAL TASK FORCE REPORT.

REGIONAL DECISION-MAKING: SYSTEM IN CALIFORNIA

The impetus toward regional decision-making systems in California has grown out of four main conditions: The state and federal governments' tendency to favor regional means of program review and administration, the increased demand of some local pressure groups for greater centralization, and the organizational assumption that many units of local government necessitate centralized control of planning by some higher authority, and the perceived failure of local government to solve "regional" problems. The proliferation of regional units (especially by the state and federal governments) prompted the Task Force to examine the citizens' need for regional decision-making systems.

Historically, effective problem-solving through local government cooperation has preceded the creation of regional problem-solving organizations. The records show that two major regional problems of Southern California -- air pollution and water distribution -- had begun to dissipate even before the creation of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). In the early 1900's voluntary countywide or multicounty organizations were established either as general purpose forums for discussion of common problems or as agencies set up primarily to deal with the solution of a specific problem. Most commonly, these organizations were in urban areas or focused around urban centers and had no effective power base separate from the local governments which had formed them. Examples are the Hetch-Hetchy Water System and delivery of Colorado River water to the Los Angeles Basin.

During the mid-sixties, state and federal actions weakened the county system by continually bypassing these voluntary efforts at problem solving by

setting up fiscal review procedures that took effective responsibility from operating agencies. Strong incentives were created for regional organizations to satisfy federal funding agencies rather than to facilitate arrangements for problem solving.

Consequently, the failures of these planning agencies have brought increasing pressures for expanded regional decision-making systems in the 70's. The state and federal governments have continued to favor regionalism in the name of simplifying operations and controlling costs.

Currently, proponents of regionalism favor mandated membership, an independent funding source, and authority to force compliance with plans. But, whatever the specific design, the demands for expanded regional decision-making systems carry with them the implied hope that they will reduce federal and state intervention and provide more local control and, thus, more responsive government for the citizens.

However, we found that:

- a. Although all proposals assume that the assignment of authority, responsibility, and functional control to an integrated regional organization will result in effective regional problem solving --
 - 1) It is highly unlikely that the federal and state governments will actually delegate the necessary authority,
 - 2) The constituents of the regional organization will, in the absence of delegated authority, retain their parochial interests and preclude the adoption of a regional perspective, and

3) In order to meet regional expectations, the organization will seek to obtain operational responsibilities for some functions, and thus to become another layer of government -- precisely the result it was set up to avoid.

b. There is no evidence to support the contention that regional organizations would be more efficient or effective than existing local governments acting cooperatively.

c. It is highly likely that, due to the conditions described above regional governments will be less responsive than present local governments.

d. The citizens seem to realize the weaknesses inherent in the regional concept. A 1973 survey of California citizens found:

QUESTION: Suppose that the state government saw that several cities in a certain part of the state all had a similar problem. So the State Legislature transferred the authority to handle the problem to a specially created regional organization to handle this problem for all cities.

	GOVERNMENT SIZE					TOTAL
	<u>500,000+</u>	<u>150,000- 499,999</u>	<u>50,000- 149,999</u>	<u>Under 50,000</u>	<u>Unincorp.+ Non-places</u>	
Makes good sense; they should do it.	32%	21%	27%	27%	24%	27%
They shouldn't do it without the approval of the voters in those cities.	58%	72%	69%	69%	67%	67%
Don't Care	10%	7%	4%	4%	8%	7%
Don't Know	---	---	---	---	1%	*

These findings lead us to conclude that:

- a. There will be a loss of local authority and responsibility, decreasing the viability of existing local governments, if regional organizations are established,
- b. There will also be a loss of citizen control over policies, plans and programs.
- c. Any regional organization will ultimately become another layer of government.

Therefore, we do not believe that there is a need for regional governments or that there must be an integrated plan for an entire region. Instead, we find a need for more effective areawide decision-making mechanisms:

- a. There is a need for areawide planning mechanisms that operate on the principle of exception rather than inclusion.
- b. There is a need for areawide problem-solving mechanisms to mediate disputes between jurisdictions.
- c. State and federal authorities should utilize existing general purpose local governments to handle planning and to act as their agents in permit authorization.

We also believe that such mechanisms must be tied to the principles of citizen control and local home rule. In postulating recommendations consistent with these findings, the Task Force has adopted the following principles concerning problem-solving within our regional areas:

- a. The greatest hinderance to designing local government decision-making systems to solve areawide problems is the intervention of state and federal agencies.
- b. The development of a decision-making system(s) to solve areawide problems should be accomplished by local government.
- c. The permissive authority to accomplish this goal should be given to local government by the State Legislature. Rural areas have no need at present for this type of decision-making system but may in the future.
- d. Local government units should constitute the building blocks used to design an areawide decision-making system that has incentives to solve problems at the lowest possible governmental level.
- e. To accomplish this problem solving at the lowest possible level, county COG's should be formed.
- f. The creation of such a decision-making system must result from a vote of the people.
- g. All planning or operational programs of a specific regional area should be performed by local government -- cities, counties or special districts.
- h. Permit authority, as it affects private sector activity, should be decentralized from the state and federal governments to counties and cities to provide one-stop shopping.

SOLUTIONS TO "REGIONAL" PROBLEMS:

Solutions to "regional" problems: As a result of analyzing both the relationships of local governments to federal and state governments, and the structural problems of local governments, the Task Force recommends that those problems characterized as "regional" be solved by:

- a. Precision in problem definition: By administrative action, and in all future legislation, define specifically the boundaries, both geographical and political, of so-called "regional" problems. Such definition will eliminate the issue of characterizing all problems which are difficult to solve as "regional".
- b. Areawide decision-making systems: For all problems defined in (a) above, allow, through legislative action permissive authority to the counties within the defined area of the problem to establish areawide organizations empowered to develop and implement solutions. Require that such organizations be established only by a majority vote of the electorate in the affected area.
- c. State action: The state should directly, and without creating independent regional structures, solve any problems defined in (a) above not solved as a result of local actions taken in accordance with (b) above.
- d. One-stop permit authority: By legislative action, the state should authorize counties and cities to act as agents in permit authorization.
- e. Principles for implementing areawide decision-making systems: The Task Force recommends that the following principles be adopted in legislation authorizing the development of areawide decision-making systems:

- 1) That cities and counties remain the designated local units for areawide planning,
- 2) That the basic units of an areawide organization be the county Councils of Governments (COG's),
- 3) That the COG's in any areawide organization be given the power to develop rules of mediation and binding arbitration that will facilitate interjurisdictional problem solving,
- 4) That the powers in (3) above adhere to the COG only upon a vote of the electorate establishing the COG and defining its powers,
- 5) That special districts become full partners in the COG's.

The following principles were suggested as an alternative to the principles recommended by the Task Force. This alternative has a definite potential to result in independent regional governments and, therefore, is not recommended by the Task Force:

- 1) That areawide decision-making systems be built from the base of the existing COG structure,
- 2) That membership in the upgraded COG's be mandatory for all cities and counties,
- 3) That an independent method of financing be developed to give the upgraded COG independence from federal funding,
- 4) That this new decision-making system have the authority to enforce plans and require coordination of all agencies in the area,

- 5) That the new decision-making system not have the power to operate programs,
- 6) That mini-COG's should be created as sub-units of the new decision-making system for planning purposes.