

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From September 2015 to March 2016, the Citizens League convened a special task force to consider possible Metropolitan Council reforms in response to growing questions and concerns.

With the belief that the importance of the region is larger than just the sum of the interests of individuals, cities, counties, and even beyond the seven counties in the Metropolitan Council's formal jurisdiction, the task force reviewed the Metropolitan Council's performance against its goals; learned from a variety of stakeholders about the concerns raised; examined the tensions between the Metropolitan Council and counties, cities and individual Minnesotans; and discussed possible changes from the starting place of preserving and strengthening the Metropolitan Council's regional effectiveness.

Citizens League Key Findings and Conclusions

1. Because the Chair and members of the Metropolitan Council are appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the Governor, Council members are perceived by some as primarily accountable to the Governor and not to the districts from which they were appointed or to the region as a whole. This structure is viewed by some as preventing members from acting as an independent advocate for their district or the region.
2. With Metropolitan Council member term(s) being coterminous with the Governor's term(s), this results in the possibility of a complete turnover of members with each new Governor. This works against the Metropolitan Council's charge of long-term planning for the orderly and economical development of the region.
3. There is growing poverty, both concentrated and dispersed, throughout the region, and this should inform decision-making under the current authority of the Metropolitan Council.
4. Water quality and supply is a critical long-term regional asset and is currently perceived to be complicated by numerous overlapping, governmental entities with planning, operational, and regulatory authority. The Council has certain authorities for water planning in the region.
5. There are important questions and valid concerns about the region's transit and transportation finance and delivery systems related to accountability and transparency, efficiency and effectiveness, and equity.

Citizens League Recommendations to the Governor and Legislature

1. Adopt fixed four-year, staggered terms for Metropolitan Council members. Members would still be appointed by the Governor and would serve fixed, four-year terms. The Chair would be appointed by the Governor and continue to serve at the pleasure of the Governor per statute 473.123, Subd. 4.
2. The Metropolitan Council member selection process should include more input by citizens and local officials, strengthening the credibility of the Metropolitan Council, and further encouraging the appointment of well-qualified members. To achieve this, the Citizens League proposes:
 - a. Expanding the current Metropolitan Council nominations committee from seven to 13 members. Of these 13 members, seven should represent citizens-at-large and six should represent local governments: three appointed by counties and three appointed by cities.

- b. Adding additional public announcements to the current selection process:
 - i. Detailed position description with required skills, time commitment, and connection to district to be clearly articulated and posted in advance of the call for nominees.
 - ii. Requiring that the nominations committee recommend three finalists for each Metropolitan Council seat. The names of these finalists and their qualifications should be made public at least 14 days prior to final selection by the Governor.
- c. Adding to the current Metropolitan Council member qualifications:
 - i. Experience in local government and/or experience in such areas including but not limited to transportation, housing, environment, and regional development.
 - ii. The need/ability to represent both the demographic diversity of each district and the region as a whole.
 - iii. Ability to meet the time commitment required to attend Council and community meetings, as specified in the position description.

Citizens League Recommendations to the Metropolitan Council

- 3. Fully deploy the Met Council's *current* authority to reduce concentrations of poverty in the region and foster increased connections to social and economic opportunities. Full utilization of Met Council authority includes but is not limited to:
 - a. The creation of an equity policy plan to reduce concentrations of poverty in the region;
 - b. The evaluation of existing transit routes to ensure the best means to more directly connect areas of concentrated poverty with job centers and high-growth industry clusters; and
 - c. Using its research and convening authority to align regional stakeholders in pursuing strategies that will reduce poverty and its concentration, increase economic and social opportunity to advance future economic growth and mitigate the impact of demographic changes in the region related to aging.

Recommendations for Further Study by the Citizens League

Water Supply

- 4. The Citizens League task force acknowledges the importance of water supply in the region, as well as the many government agencies involved in its management. However, the task force did not study this issue in sufficient detail to provide a recommendation on such an important, regional issue. As such, the task force recommends that this issue be further studied by the Citizens League to ensure that water supply remains adequate and sustainable across the region, including all entities involved in its management and regulation.

Transportation Planning and Governance

- 5. Experts who met with the Citizens League task force maintained that the region's system of transit governance, planning, funding and operation works well despite its seemingly fragmented but definitely complex nature. Still, there are important questions related to accountability and transparency, efficiency and effectiveness, and equity. Given the limited time the task force had to review these issues, it recommends that the Citizens League undertake a study of the region's system of governance, planning, funding and operation of all forms of transportation.