Making a Case for Social Innovation as a Structural Counterpart to Public Participation in Regional Planning

Manju A. Adikesavan

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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MAKING A CASE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION AS A STRUCTURAL COUNTERPART TO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN REGIONAL PLANNING

by

MANJU AISHWARYA ADIKESAVAN

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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by

Manju Aishwarya Adikesavan

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date

Dr. Laxmi Ramasubramanian

Thesis Advisor

Date

Dr. Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis

Acting Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
MAKING A CASE FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AS A SOCIAL INNOVATION MECHANISM IN REGIONAL PLANNING

by

Manju Aishwarya Adikesavan

Advisor: Dr. Laxmi Ramasubramanian

Multi-locational living – working, shopping, playing, learning and commuting across administrative and, sometimes even political boundaries is an essential aspect of metropolitan living. Although it is anticipated that everyday experiences of the physical, social and economic inter-connectedness between urban communities and peri-urban hinterlands would automatically engender a regional outlook in planning and governance, it is currently not the case. In the New York City region, a lived regional experience does not translate into support for a regional governance structure.

While strong legislative support has ensured the public its rightful place within metropolitan regional planning, it has regrettably bred a procedural focus that has reduced public participation to an end in itself. Current approaches to public participation at the metropolitan scale limit the extent to which the public can meaningfully engage with issues of regional import, contribute their experiential knowledge towards envisioning solutions, and impact plan outcomes. This thesis presents a structural approach to public participation that redresses the current procedural
focus by emphasizing the significance of the interlinkages between the governance structure, planning process and public participatory process in determining the quality and outcome of public participation in planning processes.

Applying the structural approach to the case of metropolitan transportation planning (MTP) in the United States, this thesis provides a comparative analysis of the public participation exercises conducted by two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) in the New York - New Jersey – Connecticut Tristate region, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA). The NJTPA and NYMTC, despite being neighboring MPOs that share a common regional legacy, have responded differently to the region’s dynamics and evolved to be MPOs with very disparate organizational characteristics and regional impact. An in-depth study of newspaper articles, plan documents and government reports, and interviews of key office bearers demonstrate how this disparity impacts the design and implementation of the respective MPO’s public participation exercises.

The structural approach demonstrates that lack of a direct relationship, such as a regional tax base or regional service provision, is an impediment to public perception of and active participation in regional governance. In the absence of opportunities for direct relationship with the regional public, engaged leadership and robust inter and intra-regional partnerships emerge as significant factors for fostering public participation in metropolitan planning processes. This thesis identifies best practices for successful engagement of the regional public – adapting to emerging (millennial) modes of engagement, appropriate messaging of complex, large-scale problems in personally relatable terms and convening the public on a regional scale - exemplified in NJTPA’s public outreach strategy. Six indicators of regional governance capacity from a
public participatory perspective are proposed to raise awareness and address the lack of metrics for evaluating structural support for public participation in regional planning contexts.

Finally, the structural approach demonstrates how the MPO governance structure and MTP planning process prioritize public participation as an accessory to decision making thereby undermining its potential for problem solving and social innovation. Addressing this lack, this thesis advocates for recognizing public-led social innovation as a structural counterpart to public participation for devising visionary solutions to regional scale issues. It concludes that public participation in regulatory planning tasks such as allocation of funds for transportation improvement programs is the right mechanism to implement solutions but not necessarily the right one for devising solutions.
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List of Abbreviations

EPA U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

FHWA Federal Highway Administration, USDOT

HEP Office of Planning, Environment and Realty, FHWA

HUD U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

IAP2 International Association for Public Participation

IRUM Institute of Rational Urban Mobility

MPO Metropolitan Planning Organization

MTA Metropolitan Transportation Authority

NJTPA North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority

NYMTC New York Metropolitan Transportation Council

NYSDOT New York State Department of Transportation

RPA Regional Plan Association

RPSD Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

RTP Regional Transportation Plan

SCI Sustainable Communities Initiative

TIP Transportation Improvement Program
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>TSTC</td>
<td>Tristate Transportation Campaign</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPWP</td>
<td>Unified Planning Work Program</td>
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<td>USDOT</td>
<td>United States Department of Transportation</td>
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Planning is a public activity (Friedmann 1987) and nothing underscores the public characteristic of planning better than the principle of public participation. While there is nothing revelatory about this observation, it bears reminding as the complexity of planning is such that it is all too easy to forget that planning is, and if not, should be a public activity. That planning is so many other things as well – it is political requiring legitimacy, it is technical requiring professional expertise, it is administrative requiring organizational structure and institutional support, to a name a few – should only make it more challenging, not less public. This short reminder, that manifesting and channeling the social, cultural and economic desires of the public is one of the objectives of planning, sets the tone for the discussion to follow.

Observing present day practices of public participation, I could not help notice that most public participatory initiatives were small-scale and community based, typically involving a small group of participants with a very direct and immediate stake in the project outcomes, and found myself wondering about the scalability of these qualities of public participation to larger scales of planning and governance. Probing further, I wondered if it is right to assume that public participation in larger-scale settings such as the regional will retain the characteristics of localized community based initiatives. If not, what would public participation on a regional scale look like? Planning literature quite comprehensively covers most practice-related dilemmas and issues, why is there not much discussion on the impact of scale on public participation?
In their study of public participation in large metropolitan regions, Pickering and Minnery (2012, 250) assert, “If the principle of public participation is important for neighborhoods, there is no reason why it should not be important for metropolitan regions, even though the scales are quite different.” Further they note, “the theory and practice of public participation remains rooted in approaches appropriate to the neighborhood or smaller scale” (Pickering and Minnery 2012, 249). Indeed, commonly available literature – best practice guides, handbooks, case studies and policy guidelines - tend to focus on content for facilitating public participation in local planning contexts. A search through the “enormous and continuing accumulation of literature on public participation in planning” (Huxley 2013, 1531) for research on public participation at the regional scale, especially research that would serve to coalesce empirical knowledge yields few results. That the few articles found tackle fundamental questions of how and can public participation work at the regional scale is evidence that remarkably little attention has been paid to the issue of scale in discussions about public participation in planning. Outside of academia, governmental capacity-building mechanisms such as online public-access repositories of participation design guides and best practices feature exemplary public involvement and outreach exercises\(^1\). Such resources, which describe community-based public participation in painstaking detail, feature public participation in regional-level planning processes as a minute sub section. Overall, it is safe to say the recognition of scale as a factor in

designing and incorporating public participation in planning processes is not yet well developed (Pickering and Minnery 2012).

1.2 The need for regional participatory structures

As the human population becomes predominantly urban, regions grow in significance as planning and governance entities (Vidal 2010; RPA 2013; Khanna 2016). For the growing number of urban residents, the most commonly relatable urban experience is that of multi-locational living – commuting across administrative, sometimes even political boundaries, for work and the myriad other activities of everyday living (Katz 2000). It might seem that the everyday experience of the physical, social and economic interlinkages between urban communities would automatically engender a regional outlook in planning and governance. Yet, in the United States, historically persistent problems demonstrate that a lived regional experience does not easily translate into a regional governance structure. For example, regionalist advocacy for local planning within an overarching framework of regional policies, such as for mixed-income housing or transit oriented development, has for long been held as an intrusion on local self-governance.

Regionalism advocates for planning and governing of communities across instead of only within boundaries. The interconnectedness wrought by urbanization and globalization means that most problems faced by communities require broad based participation from people and governments, at scales varying from the local to the global, to be tackled effectively. Just as regionalist attempts to tackle the large-scale complexities of urban issues challenge established systems of planning and governance, they require different benchmarks and expectations of
public participation than that currently in vogue. This thesis emerges from the belief that a synergistic relationship between the public and the planning process can facilitate the expression of the regional experience in regional planning and governance. Preliminary thought indicates that irrespective of the form public participation takes, regional participatory structures would need the capacity to:

1. involve large numbers of people spread over multiple administrative boundaries
2. allow for a spectrum of participatory functions and impact
3. allow for a spectrum of planning outcomes ranging from the visionary to the regulatory

Further reflection indicates that the desired capacities of a regional participatory structure might be easier to formulate than the contextual socio-political and cultural forces that influence and shape it.

1.3 Possible reasons for the lack of an established structure for regional public participation

The region is a relatively new emergence occupying an interstitial space with respect to traditional pre-urban political structures that emphasize the local, state and national scales of governance. As communities urbanized and development spilled over traditional local government borders, metropolitan regions emerged with new governing challenges and issues. Hamilton (2013) documents four basic approaches to regional governance practiced in the United States since the turn of the twentieth century: establishing a regional government through government consolidation, establishing a regional government tier with authority to address regional issues, creating regional special districts, and voluntary regional collaboration and cooperation. Importantly, fluctuating political and legislative support has lent a turbulent
First, in an ideal world, institutions for governance would match the boundaries of the environmental, economic, social and cultural interactions that constitute regions. In reality, such multi-faceted alignment is impossible for a variety of reasons. The nature of boundaries is such that each topical issue has a unique regional boundary and no one boundary would suffice for all the aspects of a region. For example, economic regions are likely to differ from watersheds, which in turn will differ from state boundaries. Seltzer and Carbonell (2011) note that even in the case of administrative boundaries, realignment to regional requirements is not easy. Boundaries are associated with property value and changing boundaries is not only a governance challenge but also an economic one. Boundaries take on cultural meaning - race and class are closely associated with jurisdictional boundary and politics. Thus, proposing a change in boundaries can be perceived as attack on long-held beliefs making institutional realignment for purposes of sustainability or efficiency not just an administrative challenge but also a matter of cultural change and public resolution (Foster and Barnes 2012). Consequently, though we live in regions we plan and govern through jurisdictions that are far from regional.

Second, local control and the aspiration to maintain local institutions for planning and resource management are not easily displaced. The regionalist stance of co-planning for local and regional scales requires some degree of relinquishment of local control based on trust and goodwill between communities. When absent, the building of said values becomes the first and often time-consuming step. (note honoring Seltzer and Carbonell also observe that interlinkages between communities in a region and aligning physical, social and economic
trajectories for the future within a regional agenda is challenging because it calling for idealistic tendencies.

Third, US regional governments, except when mandated, are ineffectual by design, as they have very little land-use power, no tax base, no direct representation and no constitutional base (Katz, 2000). This is by far the most significant barrier to public perception of and active participation in regional governance - in addition to limiting the “teeth” of regional governments or regional planning agencies it also limits direct engagement with the regional public.

Fourth, the literature on megaregions is thin, offering no clear definition and only fuzzy boundaries for megaregions. In addition, writings on megaregions largely consist of unpublished reports and opinion pieces (Innes, Booher, and Di Vittorio 2011). While successful at capturing reader interest these forms of writing lack the depth of analysis and rigor to sufficiently advance knowledge about the planning and governance of mega regions.

If the above-mentioned problems are impediments to comprehensive regional planning, public participation, as a planning practice, is not without its share of troubles. Despite gaining recognition as an essential democratic practice, public participation continues to contend with the traditional tension between representation and participation, with the ensuing power dynamics remaining an evergreen and fundamental struggle. In addition, various misgivings directed at the practices of public participation –the prescriptive and ineffective nature of regulatory public meetings and hearings, philosophical debates over just process versus just outcomes, the resource intensive nature of meaningful participatory exercises, to name a few - keep scholars of public participation busy. However, the discussions in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis demonstrate that
the greatest impediment to public perception of and active participation in regional governance despite a lived regional experience is the lack of tax base or direct regional service provision.

1.4 The current state of regional planning in the United States

Despite periodic reverses, regional planning keeps returning to the spotlight because the contemporary challenges of urbanization are beyond the scope of what a single jurisdiction can manage. The U.S. federal government has renewed interest in comprehensive regional planning since the great recession of the late 2000s resulted in widespread loss of living wage jobs and intensified income inequality within and between communities (Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities 2016). Consequently, persistent racial and ethnic concentrations of poverty, an issue that regionalists have doggedly focused on for half a century or more, began receiving federal attention through initiatives such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants Program. Launched in 2009, the Program supports cross-sectoral multijurisdictional planning efforts that integrate housing, land use, economic and workforce development, transportation, and infrastructure investments. The continuing proliferation of urban mega regions comprised of multiple major cities interspersed with suburbs that share daily socio-economic and other interdependencies, has led to local level changes as well. Cities traditionally resistant to regional planning, such as New York City, are beginning to acknowledge the inescapable need for regional planning – the
City announced the creation of its new regional planning division in mid-2016\(^2\). The underlying message is the governance of regions, no doubt tricky, is unavoidable.

1.5 Why public participation can be key in emerging regional governance practices

Most regional planners will agree that regions are less about political boundaries and more about the dynamics borne out of shared overlapping interests. Healey (2007) in her study of three European city regions contends that a region is less a physical, bounded reality than a shared idea and a place where people are linked through relational webs. Consequently, regionalism makes a case for a structural outlook based on functions and relationships rather than jurisdictions (Seltzer and Carbonell 2011). Critical regionalists lend a perspective that relates community and regions as both representing an existing set of relationships ((Hines 2008). The idea that a region is always at some level an attempt to persuade as much as it is to describe can be an apt descriptor for regional governance as well.

This accent on persuasion finds support in new regionalism that adopts an activist outlook to regional governance (Wheeler, 2002). Regional planning tackles issues that no single jurisdiction or implementing agency can address or manage effectively on its own requiring inter-jurisdictional strategies for governance. In the decentralized political system of the US, voluntary informal associations towards a regional effort are emerging as the starting point for collaborations between institutions and other actors. If effective governance is a joint effort among political, private and nonprofit actors, then regional governance in the absence of strong

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organizational frameworks is even more dependent on the public perception of the region and persuasion of the public and other nonpolitical actors to foster strategic regional partnerships. Innes, Booher, and Di Vittorio (2011) make a good case for enlisting public support and involvement in regional governance from below.

“Incomes, watersheds, airsheds, housing and labor markets all are part of a megaregion, and equity issues from poverty to the distribution of environmental hazards often need to be addressed at a megaregion scale. Statistics alone, however, are not enough to define a megaregion, which is a socially constructed phenomenon. It matters whether people perceive the megaregion.” (Innes, Booher, and Di Vittorio 2011)

In this spirit, I put forth the aspiration that public participation in regional planning could be a synergistic activity that fosters public perception of the region and simultaneously energizes regional governance.

1.6 Research Questions

I conclude this introductory chapter with the overarching research question, how does scale affect the function and structure of public participation in regional planning processes? The sub questions presented below capture the underlying threads of inquiry.

- What are the problems associated with replicating community-scale participatory processes at the metropolitan regional scale?
- What are the potential advantages of restructuring public participation for the regional scale?
- What would be the foundational principles of public participatory structures that meet the unique needs of metropolitan regional planning?
1.7 Organization of the document

The following chapter, chapter 2, is devoted to the review of literature on public participation and regional governance. Chapter 2 presents thematic gaps and promising angles for expanding the body of knowledge on public participation in regional planning in new directions. It concludes with a summary of findings used for developing the conceptual model and framework for analyzing a regional public participatory exercise presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 also presents the rationale behind the structural approach for evaluating public participatory practices in planning processes advocated by the conceptual model. A comparative case study of two recently concluded regional public participation exercises is proposed to examine the interlinkages between the governance structure, the planning process and the public participatory exercises emphasized in the conceptual model. The metropolitan planning organization (for the governance structure), the regional transportation plan (RTP) (for planning process) and the public outreach conducted as part of the RTP planning process (for the public participatory exercise) comprise the elements of the case study. Two MPOs, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) of the NY-NJ-CT metropolitan region (the Tristate region) and their respective public outreach activities conducted during the preparation of the RTP in the year serve as the cases for comparison. Chapter 4 presents the regional planning history of the Tristate region beginning with the region’s failed experience with comprehensive regional planning before the institution of the NYMTC and the NJTPA in 1982. This chapter presents the lingering lack of regional leadership, political consensus and influential regional forums dedicated to tackling cross jurisdictional, especially interstate, issues and making them part of the regional public discourse. The NJTPA and NYMTC despite being neighboring MPOs that
share a common regional legacy have responded differently to the region’s dynamics and evolved to be MPOs with divergent organizational characteristics and regional impact. The implications of the difference in organizational dynamics and capacity on NJTPA’s and NYMTC’s RTP “public outreach” (NJTPA 2013, NYMTC 2013a) exercises are tackled in chapter 5. A description of the two agencies’ “outreach” activities followed by an analysis based on the analytical framework described in chapter 3 comprises chapter 5. Chapter 6 presents findings and chapter 7 presents the conclusions and directions for future research.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

The dual themes of regional governance and public participation presented in chapter 1 continue in this chapter dedicated to the review and summary of existing literature as they have proven useful to thread arguments, discover gaps, and identify areas of intersection. Significant gaps and promising angles in the literature helped identify lines of inquiry for expanding the body of knowledge on public participation in new directions. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings that serve to develop the conceptual model of public participation in regional planning processes presented in chapter 3.

2.1 Theme 1: Public Participation

Public participation in urban planning is the subject of much as evidenced by the “enormous and continuing accumulation of literature on public participation in planning” (Huxley 2013). Many federal, state, and local laws mandate public participation in decision making about long-range planning, capital improvement programming, or major investment studies when public funds are involved (HEP 2017). Strong legislative support for public participation, in place since the late 1960s, indicates its vital role in democratic governance. However, a reading of literature devoted to public participation indicates the value and desirability of public participation notwithstanding, the implementation and practice of it remains complicated and problematic (Arnstein 1969; Innes and Booher 2004; Schlossberg and Shuford 2005; Ramasubramanian 2010; Huxley 2013). Academics and practitioners alike agree that meeting regulatory requirements for public participation through public meetings, hearings and collection of public comments is the bare minimum. The wealth of available resources
notwithstanding\textsuperscript{3}, engaging with the public and engendering participation defies formulaic approaches, and takes considerable skill, expertise and resources to gauge what constitutes “meaningful” public participation within a planning context. Therefore, it is not surprising that the practice of public participation in planning is the subject of much debate and research, or expectations from it keep evolving with changing times and trends. The 1990s saw ‘alternative practice frameworks’ such as “collaborative public engagement” advocated by Innes and Booher (2004) evolve and take root as a valid participatory practice for critical conflict resolution contexts such as natural resource management. In recent times, the post 1960s undercurrents of adversity and confrontation that tinged academic explorations of government-public interactions have given way to more settled and reflective explorations of public participation. Emphasizing the role of context in shaping planning practices, Huxley (2013) contends that the standardization of public participatory practices while unsuitable also runs counter to the principle of participation itself. Still others are exploring broader questions of how ideas travel and find traction in a society (Healey 2013) and the cooperative dynamics between collective and distributive forms of power in planning (Koch 2013).

\section*{2.1.1 Articulating objectives of public participation in planning}

Public participation is so widely embedded in political and civic discourse that it is hard to imagine a need to explicate its objectives. Yet there are good reasons to do so. First, the term public participation is quite broad and open to interpretation. Alternative terms, coined or

widely in circulation since the 1970s, such as civic engagement, public involvement, civic participation, and community-based planning are equally inadequate to comprehensively describe the principle, its objective, and function vis-à-vis the planning process. Second, as touched upon earlier, public participation defies formulaic approaches so a definition needs to be abstract enough to allow room for contextual maneuvering and discretion. Third, the predominance of literature on the dynamics of power in the public-agency relationship, its (im)balance, and distribution can leave one with a polarized view of public participation centered on decision making in planning. The exercise of explicating objectives presents an opportunity to state that collective problem solving and capacity building too are worthy objectives of public participation.

The following set of questions, in lieu of concrete objectives, arise from a review of academic and governmental literature on public participation. They are an assemblage, each representing an essential nuance of public participation, and represent the amalgam of ideas that public participation represents.

- Is public participation about subscribing to a typology of “power sharing” between citizens and public office-bearers?

- Is public participation about assuring “public programs are relevant to their (citizens’) needs and responsive to their priorities” (Arnstein 1969)?

- Is public participation about ensuring social and environmental justice for socially disconnected marginalized groups that lack capacity and voice?
• Is public participation about access to democratic governance – ensuring every interested citizen is offered a ‘say’ in public affairs?

• Is public participation about improving citizen/civic capacity for engaging with and tackling the collective needs and problems of the society?

2.1.2 Articulating capacities of regional public participatory structures

Section 1.2 in chapter 1 proffered a preliminary notion of a regional participatory structure by identifying the following as its essential capacities.

1. involve large numbers of people spread over multiple administrative boundaries

2. allow for a spectrum of participatory functions and impact

3. allow for a spectrum of planning outcomes ranging from the visionary to the regulatory

Each of these capacities presents a lens for reviewing literature on public participation and they are employed as such in the following section.

1. Involve large numbers of people spread over multiple administrative boundaries - Pickering and Minnery (2012) observe that the matter of participatory structures, irrespective of scale, is not easily resolved due to the ever-present tension inherent in the principles underlying them. In general, choices between direct versus representative participation, and aggregative\(^4\) versus deliberative\(^5\) participation determine strategies for tackling the geographic extent and

\(^4\) aggregative approach to decision making - where a decision is arrived at arithmetically, adding up the number of supporters of each view to find which is supported by the majority (Pickering and Minnery 2012)

\(^5\) deliberative approach to decision making - where solutions are found or decisions are made through active debate (Pickering and Minnery 2012)
number of people included in a public participation exercise. A quick review of a database\textsuperscript{6} of public participatory exercises conducted by regional planning agencies suggests that aggregative approaches are favored over deliberative approaches. Research on participatory GIS based group decision-making (Jankowski and Nyerges 2001) and deliberative public participation in regional planning contexts (Nyerges and Aguirre 2011) exist and prove that technology-enabled large-scale deliberative participation is possible. Unfortunately, these methods have not found the political backing necessary for implementation outside research settings.

2. **Allow for a spectrum of participatory functions and impact** - Academic and praxis-oriented literature present participatory typologies describing the variations in agency-public power sharing and public impact on plan outcomes in ample detail (Arnstein 1969; Schlossberg and Shuford 2005; IAP2 2014; EPA [2010]). *The Public Participation Manual* on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) website notes that typologies offer a good guideline to determine participatory exercises appropriate for a project as “there are numerous levels at which you (the planner) might wish to engage with the public based on the project, the stakeholders, and the decisions to be made.” Any discussion of typology for public participation would be incomplete without referring to Arnstein’s very influential and much cited *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969). Arnstein's choice of words for the typology, “manipulation”, “therapy”, “informing”, “placation”, reflect the adversarial nature of the public-agency interactions of her times. Seemingly hard hitting and provocative, Arnstein’s terms are

https://www.planning.dot.gov/focus_caseStudies.aspx
sometimes misleading. For instance, she identifies citizen control as the highest form of citizen power in her “ladder” only to qualify elsewhere, “absolute control” is something no one…..has or can have” in a democracy. However, Arnstein’s typology is notable for including activities that ‘don't’ constitute participation (manipulation and therapy) and for qualitatively differentiating ‘token or passive’ participation (informing, consultation, and placation) from ‘active’ participation (partnership and delegated power). She also notes passive participation (inviting citizens' opinions and informing citizens) can be legitimate steps only when combined with active participation (partnership and delegation). Her work is also important for acknowledging that the different types of participation are not necessarily exclusive and more likely to coexist.

The International Association for Public Participation’s (IAP2) spectrum of public participation (IAP2 2014) offers a contrast to Arnstein’s (1969) “ladder” by being more informative of the goal of each public-agency interaction (inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower) presented in the spectrum. It is notable for interpreting each type of public participation in terms of the promise it makes to the public, and using consistent language that makes comparison across types convenient. For instance, where the first activity inform’s promise is “we will keep you informed”, the second activity consult’s promise is “we will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspiration, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision” (IAP2 2014) making it easy to grasp the qualitative difference between the two types.

Nyerges and Aguirre (2011) refer to the lack of popularity of the analytic-deliberative framework developed by the National Research Council (1996), despite its comprehensive
depiction of the stages and actors in a planning process. The framework departs from the
popular typological presentation of public-agency decision-making in the following significant
angles. First, the framework presents three actor-groups, “public officials”, “natural and social
scientists”, and “interested and affected parties” instead of the dual “public” and “agency”
delineation prevalent in literature. When interpreted as politico-legal mandate (public officials),
technical knowledge (natural and social scientists) and experiential knowledge (interested and
affected parties), the three actor-groups represent a more realistic depiction of the roles of the
actors typically involved in planning processes. Second, the framework breaks down the
planning process into seven constituent activities and presents a scenario where the three actor-
groups deliberate and analyze through each stage of the process. Ongoing deliberation and
analysis amongst actors in the various stages of a planning process, potentially involving
multiple sessions, while seeming idealistic is nevertheless desirable (Sustainable NYCT 2014).
Third, the framework reframes each actor-group as a participant with each group differentiated
only by its function in the planning process. For this interpretation to hold, each actor-group
would have to identify as a member of the public participating in a public activity, with each
group differentiated only by its role and function in the planning process. A view not unlike the
demand for recognizing governance actors as collaborators and partners echoed in the work of
advocates of collaborative planning, self-organized and networked governance (Innes et al
2011; Nelles 2013; Katz 2015; Lang and Nelson November 2011). In addition, each group
would also have to view the participation of the other two as essential, not optional.
3. **Allow for a spectrum of planning outcomes ranging from the visionary to the regulatory**

The typological approaches presented above are useful from a procedural participatory design and implementation perspective. However, they stop short of presenting the implications of each type of public-agency interaction on the planning processes themselves. From a structural viewpoint, it is significant that the numerous levels of engagement not only represent a change in the impact on decision-making but also in the nature of the planning process itself. EPA’s public participation spectrum illustrates this best (EPA [2010?]). Based on the IAP2 (2014) spectrum, the EPA spectrum is comprised of five activities. EPA presents the first two activities, *outreach and information exchange*, as conventional ‘participation’ and the last two activities, *agreements* and *stakeholder action*, as ‘formal collaboration’, the difference in terminology signaling their respective planning contexts, the former being regulatory and the latter being critical (the mid activity, *recommendations*, is presented as a crossover between the two groups). Collaboration rarely finds a place in discussions of ‘regulatory’ public participation as proponents of collaboration themselves acknowledge it is justified only in critical planning contexts where participants are willing to invest much more time and resources than those required by the commonly practiced ‘public outreach and engagement’ (Booher and Innes 2005). Nevertheless, the collaborative practice framework (Innes and Booher 2004) is significant as it represents a structural counterpart to public participation in critical planning contexts. There is a similar need for a structural counterpart to public participation in visionary planning processes, as currently there is no distinction between public participation in visionary and regulatory contexts.
This section articulating the capacities desired of regional participatory structures concludes that the procedural approach, while valuable, is insufficient to meet the emerging needs of regional planning. This calls for: 1. a structural approach to advance the body of knowledge of public participation in regional planning, 2. a structural counterpart to regulatory public participation, one more suited to visionary planning contexts.

2.2 Theme 2: Regional Governance

One of the unique characteristics of regional planning is that rather than planning within boundaries, it addresses issues across boundaries (Seltzer and Carbonell 2011). Hamilton (2013) describes four basic approaches to addressing regional governance pressures and the issue of interjurisdictional planning, two of which (establishing a regional government through government consolidation, establishing a regional government tier with authority to address regional issues) involve centralization and restructuring of the local government. The other two (creating regional special districts, and voluntary collaboration and cooperation) require minor or no changes to the general-purpose government structure.

However, the complexity of interjurisdictional planning is such that the underlying principle behind regional governments - regions are an integrated whole irrespective of the smaller governmental units constituting them - is not easily realized. It has been noted earlier that strong and unyielding support for local governments has resulted in US regional governments that are ineffectual by design - they have very little authority over land-use, no tax base, no direct representation and no constitutional base (Katz 2000). Consequently, some of the reasons for regional planning put forth by the American Planning Association (Meck 2002), such as “the
maintenance of a forum for exploring and resolving intergovernmental issues, articulation of local interests and perspectives to other levels of government and establishment of a two-way conduit between local governments and other agencies”, appear at best aspirational.

2.2.1 From Regional Government to Regional Governance

Although there is disagreement on what type of regional governing system is preferable and most effective, there is general agreement that there is a need, at least occasionally, for some form of regional governance (Hamilton 2013). Furthermore, the reality of megaregions and endless cities (see section 1.3) reinforces the fact that at any scale, local or regional, planning for discretely bounded units without accounting for interconnectedness is insufficient. At any rate, communities can choose to ignore interconnections but cannot expect to be insulated from the socio-economic consequences of doing so. Thus, contemporary discussions on regional governance have shifted from exploring accurate, appropriate and fixed to endorsing “soft-nosed”, self-organized (Lang and Nelson November 2011; Nelles 2013), leadership based (Katz 2015), collaborative and networked (Innes et al 2011) arrangements involving strategic partnerships for regional governance7.

2.2.2 New Regionalism in the Era of Regional Governance

New regionalism, one of the contemporary discourses on regional governance, contends that city-regional coordination does not require institutional consolidation, but is achievable through the creation of voluntary networks that include a variety of interdependent actors (Nelles 2013).

---

7 The term ‘government’ denotes formal and hierarchically arranged structures of authority, while governance implies policymaking that can include non-governmental actors and flexible and networked structures.
However, it does acknowledge a role for functional authorities and emphasizes the contribution of a combination of actors and authorities with different competencies in aligning institutions with the appropriate scale of metropolitan interests (Nelles 2013; Barnes and Foster 2012). New regionalists agree that collaborative governance is not necessarily politically driven governance. The acknowledgement that broader and often non-political community action at the city-region scale can influence partnerships between local authorities at the regional level boosts the case for regional public engagement. Researchers ((Nelles 2013; Innes et al 2011) and think tanks such as the Brookings Institution (Katz 2015) and Mac Arthur Foundation (Barnes and Foster 2012) refer to a greater reliance on organic and networked regional governance structure that is context specific and local leadership (business mostly) dependent. They make the case that leadership is crucial for forging links between networks and in promoting metropolitan scalar orientation, acknowledging the role played by individual agency in catalyzing metropolitan engagement.

2.2.3 Rhetoric and Persuasion in Fostering Strategic Regional Networks

Critical regionalists along with New regionalists support a move away from the time-honored definition of region as “medium-sized area in which the physical, cultural and/or functional characteristics are identifiable to those within, and to many outside, the area” (Powell 2007). Powell (2007) interprets regions as social inventions that require political legitimacy when we seek to legitimize them. This speaks directly to the observations of Innes et al (2011) who remark network governance lacks legitimacy and needs to find ways to meet key democratic values such as access and social and environmental justice.
Powell's exhortation to see regional spaces not as insular, detached, or static remnants of earlier periods, but as inextricable components of larger historical and cultural processes is complemented by the argument that people understand regions as ““rhetoric,” and "deliberate constructions,” rather than as essential or actual places” (Powell 2007). The critical regionalist notions of social invention and persuasion are vital for facilitating and forging regional partnerships in the emerging era voluntary and networked regional governance.

2.2.4 Regional Governance: Things to ponder from a structural perspective

The earlier section laid out the findings from contemporary research on regional governance. Beginning from a search for appropriate governmental forms, contemporary researchers have moved on to problem solving without political restructuring indicating a reconciliation with the political and cultural ethos of the United States. It is also indicative a better grasp of the megaregion and endless city phenomenon, which necessitates working across boundaries. On reflection, the following issues about networked, self-organized regional governance structure arise:

• How can we ensure self-organized, network dependent governance structures would be democratic? How can social and environmental justice and equity be ensured?

• How will a spectrum of planning functions be carried out? Especially given that visionary planning functions lack the structural support extended to regulatory planning.

Innes et al (2011) freely acknowledge that “network governance is not a panacea”. They continue by stating that there will be regional problems around growth, planning, and development that cannot be solved through self-organizing networks, but must be referred to
courts, legislatures, or executive decision. This leads one to think that governmental
arrangements (one of the four types described by Hamilton (2013)) are likely to co-exist
alongside self-organized structures given that no one structure can serve all the needs or solve
all the problems of a region. The potential for groupthink, lack of transparency in decision-
making, insularity, and exclusion of the disempowered does raise questions about networked
governance’s accountability and adherence to democratic principles. Innes et al (2011) suggest
diversity in participation and transparency in decisions and activities to address such
shortcomings with the caveat that little theory or institutional arrangements yet reconcile
network governance with democracy.

2.9 Gaps and Promising Angles in Literature

The legislative endorsement of public participation has regrettably bred a procedural focus on
public participation in planning and governance. Consequently, the value of a structural
approach that emphasizes the interlinkages between the governance structure, planning process
and public participation in advancing participatory design and implementation knowhow
remains relatively unexplored in literature. This lack will be addressed in the conceptual model
of public participation (described in chapter 3) developed for performing the case studies
described in the latter sections of the document.

Researchers of regional governance touch upon the difficulty of bounding a region in ways that
reconcile with existing administrative boundaries. The question of whether the fundamental
mismatch between a region’s socioeconomic and cultural dimensions and its governance
structure affects the public perception of and participation in regional planning activities is
another angle worth following.
Table 2.0 Gaps and Promising Angles in Literature on Public Participation and Regional Governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gaps in Literature</th>
<th>Promising Angles in Literature</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research on the impact of scale on public participation is sporadic and rudimentary – the few that do, adopt a procedural approach leaving the role of governance structures on public participation out of the discussion.</td>
<td>Koch’s (2011) example of examining public participation from the viewpoint of collective and distributive power structures highlights the need for a cooperative balance between the distributive power of institutions and the collective power of the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research examining regional governance does not focus on the public participatory component and vice versa.</td>
<td>Huxley’s (2012) exhortation to approach planning principles from a genealogical and historical perspective and understand their applicability to contexts opens up a space for contemporary explorations of established, “taken-for-granted” planning practices such as public participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-support theorists’ (Jankowski and Nyerges 2001) deal with regional public participation as a spatial decision making exercise. Their work proves that large-scale deliberative public participation is technologically possible but fails due to the lack of political will to implement it.</td>
<td>The analytic-deliberative framework framework developed by the National Research Council (1996) is valuable for conceptualizing public participation as a three actor-group process representing politico-legal mandate, technical knowledge and experiential knowledge, instead of the conventional dualistic public-agency conceptualization of public participation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.0 summarizes notable gaps and promising angles in literature on public participation and regional governance. Researchers examining institutional arrangements and governmental forms for metropolitan regions do not examine public participation in metropolitan planning and governance and vice-versa. It is ironic and unfortunate that public participation, a practice instituted to uphold democratic values, does not feature in a body of research preoccupied with addressing questions of governance capacity and democratic legitimacy of a networked self-organizing regional governance structure (Innes et al 2011). Mandating diversity and
transparency are possible remedies, but such prescriptive measures are likely to undermine the spirit of voluntary participation implicit in a self-organized network. Given the context specific nature of networked self-organized regional governance (Osborne 2016), a willingness to broaden the potential of public participation by exploring alternate structures, functions, and arenas for public participation that align with the organic self-organized nature of regional governance is an essential first step towards affirming vital interconnections between public participation and regional governance.

2.10 Thematic Findings 1: Public Participation

In summary, the follow characteristics are vital for an effective public participatory exercise.

**Nuanced attention to the balance of power in planning and decision-making** - An effective public participation exercise is concerned less with subscribing to a typology public participation. It focuses on facilitating a degree of power which guarantees that participants can govern a program or an institution, direct policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions for instituting change.

**Direct connections between the public and the regional planning agency** - An effective public participation exercise lowers barriers to public-agency connection by reducing the number of intermediaries between the public and the governing body. This is especially critical for regional planning as regional planning agencies charged with plan preparation are rarely in direct contact with the regional public.

**Messaging for regional connectedness** - practitioners agree that the public participate with interest when critically impacted, like at the time of Hurricane Sandy. For a regional planning
exercise, the vital question is how to package regional planning such that it connects with the public.

Recognize public participation as a social innovation mechanism – The literature review demonstrated that regional governance is a nascent issue requiring visionary and innovative solutions. Solutions unlikely to come from within a regulatory planning process may be expected from a social innovation agenda charged with devising solutions for emergent regional issues.

2.11 Thematic Findings 2: Regional Governance

In summary, the following are vital for an effective examination of regional governance.

Dimensions of governance capacity - irrespective of the formality of governance structure, Nelles (2013) proposes two dimensions of governance capacity, which will be explored in the case study.

1. The degree to which city-regional structures, whatever their form, coordinate activity at that scale.

2. The degree to which city-regions, through regional partnership structures, are effective actors in multilevel policy.

Sources of governance capacity will serve to evaluate the capacity of a regional governance structure in terms of access of city-regional partnerships to resources, autonomy from other formal levels of government, perceived legitimacy as political actors and their functional scope.
Indicators of successful collaborative regional governance – Nelles (2013) suggests the following indicators to evaluate the success of a collaborative regional initiative. By no means exhaustive, these are good starting points.

- partnerships tend to be more highly institutionalized ensuring accountability and transparency
- participation of local authorities is high, and
- Participants do not undermine the partnership by duplicating functions performed by the initiative

The next chapter, chapter 3, builds off the thematic findings summarized in this chapter to describe the conceptual model and analytical framework for evaluating regional public participatory exercises.
Chapter 3 Methods

Chapter 2 presented thematic gaps and promising angles for expanding the body of knowledge on public participation in regional planning in new directions. It concluded with a summary of findings used for developing the conceptual model and framework for analyzing a regional public participatory exercise presented in full detail in this chapter. This chapter begins by explaining the rationale behind the structural approach for evaluating public participatory practices in planning processes advocated by the conceptual model. A comparative case study of two recently concluded regional public participation exercises is proposed in later sections to examine the interlinkages between the governance structure, the planning process and the public participatory exercises emphasized in the conceptual model.

Chapter 2 concluded by highlighting two reasons for the lack of attention to public participation at the regional scale. First, the legislative endorsement of public participation has regrettably bred a procedural focus on public participation in planning and governance. Consequently, the value of a structural approach that emphasizes the interlinkages between governance structure, planning process and public participatory process in advancing participatory design and implementation knowhow is relatively unexplored. The relative lack of popularity of the structural approach has also meant that the few available studies of the impact of scale on public participation have, by extension, been subject to a procedural approach. Second, studies of the impact of scale on public participation tend to limit the dimensions of exploration to geographic extent, population size and power asymmetries among stakeholders (Pickering and Minnery 2012; Bazzanella et al 2012). In addition to the geographic extent of the plan and the size of the population served, scale also impinges on the planning and governance structures, planning
process, plan content, resources deployed, all of which have an impact on the design and implementation of public participatory exercises. The conceptual model and framework outlined in later sections address the gaps outlined above by adopting a structural approach that includes all the above-mentioned dimensions of scalar exploration.

Regional planning agencies, the organizations charged with carrying out planning at the regional scale are a motley group. Section 2.4 described the four major approaches to regional governance in North America and the types of regional planning agencies prevalent in the United States. Section 1.3 discussed the reasons why barring a few exceptions in Minnesota or Portland comprehensive regional planning akin to the land use integrated planning practices at local government levels has never enjoyed much success in the United States. However, sector-based regional governance mechanisms charged with federal resource allocation, such as metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) for investments in transportation infrastructure or regional economic development councils (REDCs) incubating locally owned small businesses have proven to be different. So much so, that the need for instituting governance mechanisms that allocate resources in equitable and locally attuned ways has made federal government a major driver for ‘functional’ metropolitan, regional, state, and interstate planning since the turn of the twentieth century (Meck, 2002; Solof, 1998). One such federally mandated regional governance structure, the metropolitan planning organization, serves as the context within which this thesis examines public participation in regional planning. Two MPOs of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut (NY-NJ-CT or Tristate region) – the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) will serve as the case agencies.
3.1 The Metropolitan Planning Organization Governance Structure

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 (see table 3.1) instituted MPOs for organizing transportation planning and directing investments in transportation infrastructure and services (NYMYC 2013a, NJTPA 2013). MPOs occupy an intermediate level between that of state and local governments and serve every urbanized area (UZA)\(^8\) with a population greater than 50,000. Typically, they are governed by boards comprised of the chief elected or appointed officials of federal, state and/or local entities with ownership of or jurisdiction over significant components of the transportation system and general purpose local government in the MPO’s planning area (Solof, 2007). The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC, n.d.) notes the federal government created MPOs with the intention of devolving transportation investment decision-making power to local elected officials further underscoring the resource allocation function of the MPO.

3.2 Federal Legislation Impacting Regional Transportation Planning in the United States, 1900s-2010s

That the federal government has been a major driver for ‘functional’ metro, regional, state, and interstate planning since the turn of the twentieth century has been noted in the earlier section (Meck, 2002; Solof, 1998; Heanue 2007). Table 3.1 shows how federal policies and urbanization trends influenced each other resulting in the emergence of the metropolitan transportation planning process as the primary mechanism for disbursing federal funds for regional transportation investments.

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\(^8\) The U.S. Census Bureau identifies two types of urban areas: Urbanized Areas (UAs) of 50,000 or more people and Urban Clusters (UCs) of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events and Trends Influencing Federal Legislation</th>
<th>Federal Legislation Impacting Regional Transportation Planning</th>
<th>Tristate Regional Events</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1900-10s</strong>&lt;br&gt;WWI; federal-aid highway program begins, road construction prompted by defense needs; very little strategic transportation thought or planning</td>
<td>1916 Federal Aid Road Act</td>
<td>1898 Consolidation of New York City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1920s</strong>&lt;br&gt;Post WWI: Modern transportation planning practices begin; systematic approach to federal funding of state roads prompts traffic counts and data collection programs</td>
<td>1921 Federal Highway Act - Federal Aid Road program proposes an immense national highway system</td>
<td>1920 RPA is formed 1929 RPA releases its First Regional Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1930s</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Great Depression; comprehensive regional planning emphasized</td>
<td>1933 National Planning Board (NPB) established 1939 NPB made the National Resource Planning Board (NRPB)</td>
<td>Robert Moses era begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1940s</strong>&lt;br&gt;Post WW II Housing Crisis; the advent of the “Motor Age”; the suburban land rush</td>
<td>1944 Congress endorses construction of nationwide interstate highway system 1949 Housing Act of 1949 – low-rent public housing and slum clearance programs introduced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1950s</strong>&lt;br&gt;Central city blight, concentration of poverty in city cores; Urban sprawl exacerbated by the 1956 Act which did not require highway routes to conform to metropolitan plans or to consider how highway routes could initiate new waves of suburban development and sprawl.</td>
<td>1954 Housing Act – federal grants for councils of governments and other metropolitan planning agencies 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act authorizes the 41000-mile interstate highway system 1959 Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) to address suburban growth and improve coordination of federally aided projects and programs.</td>
<td>1956 Metropolitan Regional Council established to promote regional coordination and address urban sprawl and regional transit issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 1960s

Large scale urban renewal spurred resistance to highways; rising concerns about environmental costs of the “motor age” - dwindling open spaces, reduced mobility of the poor, depleted natural environment

ACIR recommends replacing ad hoc regional commissions with permanent and stronger metropolitan bodies resulting in the legislations of the 1960s

The rise of the social and environmental justice movements; environmental impact assessments required of all major projects; environmental dimension added to transportation planning that would take on growing importance in decades to come.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1961 Housing Act of 1961</th>
<th>provides grants for mass transit and open space preservation and expanded funds for metropolitan transportation planning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1962 Federal Aid Highway Act – 3 C, planning process introduced</strong>; Metropolitan planning bodies created across the country and existing voluntary and quasi-official regional bodies gain official status.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1963 Clean Air Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964 Urban Mass Transportation Act, provides federal aid for development of mass transit systems and incentives for preparing metropolitan transportation plans.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965 Housing and Urban Development Act extends the “Section701” grants to mass transit planning by regional planning bodies, to improve the coordination of highway projects with transit systems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966 The Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act - areawide planning agency required to review all applications for federal aid for the planning and construction of housing, roads and other facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966 The Federal-Aid Highway Act - protections for historic buildings and natural resources in highway planning and required hearings on the economic, social and environmental effects of proposed routes.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Amendments in 1969 require citizen participation in all**

<p>| 1962 Tri-State Transportation Committee created to administer the region’s 3-C transportation planning process; renamed as Tri-State Transportation Commission in 1965 |
| 1967 RPA releases its Second Regional Plan |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>1970s</th>
<th>1980s</th>
<th>1990s</th>
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</thead>
</table>
|          | aspects of the 3-C transportation planning process administered by regional bodies.  
1969 The National Environmental Policy Act required environmental impact statements to be prepared for major projects                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 1973 Tri-State Transportation Commission renamed the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission  
1979 Metropolitan Regional Council disbanded                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 1970s    | Urban-environmental justice movement momentum continues  
1973-74 oil embargo; energy conservation and increasing capacity of mass transit prioritized; MPOs seen as change agents for advancing the cause of multi-modalism  
Holistic regional planning exercises in Portland and Minneapolis-St. Paul regions  
Dissatisfaction over New Deal policies                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Clean Air Act amended in 1970 & 1977  
**1973 Federal Aid Highway Act** - short-range component “TIP” added to the long-range plans previously developed in most urban regions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Legislative wrangling over Clean Air Act  
1981 Federal funding cuts and internal squabbling ail the Tri-State RPC  
1982 The Tri-State RPC disbands into five MPOs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 1990 Clean Air Act amended  
1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) – multimodal transportation planning emphasized; air quality standards mandated by Clean Air Amendment  
1998 Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 1994 Metropolitan Regional Council reconvened to reform New York State’s social service finance system  
1996 RPA releases its Third Regional Plan                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2000s</th>
<th>2008 The great recession affects federal funding; cross sectoral and interagency collaboration stressed as a resource sharing measure; MPOs granted discretionary power over select transportation investments</th>
<th>2005 Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity (SAFETEA-LU) Act</th>
<th>2008 Metropolitan Area Planning (MAP) Forum</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008 Metropolitan Area Planning (MAP) Forum</td>
<td>2009 The Interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities launched</td>
<td>2008 Metropolitan Area Planning (MAP) Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010s</td>
<td>Lingering effects of the economic recession; 2012 Hurricane Sandy emphasizes climate resiliency and regional coordination; the role of MPOs and stakeholder involvement strengthened; multi-modal approach to transportation planning encouraged</td>
<td>2012 Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21)</td>
<td>2011 Sustainable NYCT</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2015 Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act</td>
<td>2012 Together NJ</td>
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<td>2013 NYMTC and NJTPA adopt RTPs for 2013-17</td>
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<td>2016 NYC creates Regional Planning Division</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2017 RPA scheduled to release its Fourth Regional Plan</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Metropolitan Transportation Planning Cycle Phases

Given the origins of the MPO (described in section 3.1 and table 3.1), federal regulations play a key role in the metropolitan transportation planning process. MPOs are charged with producing and maintaining “federally required” plans such as the long-range regional transportation plan (RTP) and the short-range transportation improvement program (TIP) which constitute the primary mechanisms for distributing federal funding and prioritizing projects for the entire metropolitan area (NYMTC, 2013a). The TIP indicates whether a state DOT, metropolitan transit operator or other agency will sponsor the project and the sources of federal and state or local matching moneys that will pay for it (NJDOT, 2015).

A “continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (3-C)” planning process, practiced since the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962, is regularly invoked as the guiding principle of the metropolitan transportation planning process (Table 3.1; NYMTC 2013a; NJTPA 2013; HEP 2015; NARC n.d.). In addition, the Regional Plan Association makes a case for a fourth “C”, of
that of public consultation (RPA, 2016), lending credence to the need for specialized attention to public participation at this scale. The 3-C planning process may be broadly interpreted as a planning process that is cyclic and repeated at regular intervals (“continuing”), involves the participation of regional stakeholders and succeeds at representing their interests (“cooperative”), and identifies how the metropolitan region will manage and operate its multi-modal transportation system to meet its economic, transportation, development and sustainability goals (“comprehensive”). MPOs prepare the mandated RTP and TIP once every four years.

Figure 3.1 presents the phases of the metropolitan transportation planning cycle. Regulations also mandate that both the RTP and TIP be “fiscally constrained”, accompanied by financial outlays indicating costs and identifying funding sources, to ensure plan proposals are meaningful and not mere wish lists (Solof, 1998). A detailed analysis of the role of federal policy and legislation in shaping the RTP planning process and its concomitant public participatory exercise follows in the next chapter.
The metropolitan transportation planning cycle (NYMTC 2013a, NJTPA 2013) presented in figure 3.1 is described below.

1. The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) establishes a long-range vision and action agenda for improving transportation for people and goods within the region. The plan anticipates future travel conditions and needs, analyzing the most current information about travel and other factors such as demographic and economic projections (HEP 2015). The RTP includes a financial element addressing long term financing of transportation investments and a project index identifying project needs and concepts.

2. The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a short-range schedule of projects and programs implementing the RTP over a four-year horizon. The RTP’s project index along with projects carried over from previous TIP and local programs are collected into a preliminary TIP project pool. A financial outlay describing the design, cost, and sponsor and funding sources accompanies every project identified as a priority in the project pool. This fiscally constrained list of priority capital projects forms the TIP for the next four years. While the RTP (also known as the MTP) is approved by the MPO, the TIP as the primary funding mechanism needs to be approved by both the MPO and the Governor (Lyons and Duffy 2015). The federal fund apportionment process involving the USDOT, State DOT and the MPO are described in detail in chapter 4.

3. The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) expands upon the TIP. It is updated annually to determine how funding for projects identified in the TIP planning will be spent over the course of a program year.
3.4 Public Participation in the MPO planning process

Public participation has been part of the MPO planning process ever since amendments to the 1966 Federal-Aid Highway Act in 1969 (table 3.1) required citizen participation in all aspects of the 3-C transportation planning process (Solof 1997; Heanue 2007). Figure 3.1 and the previous section outline the sequence of the MPO facilitated metropolitan planning cycle followed every four years. The cycle begins with the preparation of the long-range RTP followed by the preparation of the short-range TIP. The preparation of the TIP signals the end of the long and short range planning and the cycle shifts to the annually prepared UPWP with left over project work carried into successive planning cycles (NJTPA 2013). It is useful to perceive the three plans as nested phases of the overall planning cycle with formal public review and comment periods offered before approval and adoption of the RTP, TIP and UPWP. Public comments are also invited when amendments to existing plans are proposed. In general, MPOs implement an organized and relatively elaborate public participation exercise only when the RTP for the successive planning cycle is under preparation. The TIP and UPWP planning processes do not feature a public participatory exercise of a scale or scope similar to that conducted during the RTP planning process. (NYMTC 2013a, NJTPA 2013, HEP 2015). Options to participate and engage with the MPOs in contexts other than the planning processes exist. Participation in year-round advisory committees, administrative and executive meetings open the public and social media platforms are some the modes commonly promoted by MPOs, NJTPA and NYMTC being no exception (NYMTC 2013b, NJTPA 2013). Since mechanisms for public participation in metropolitan transportation plan preparation are the focus of this thesis, the “public outreach” exercise conducted by NYMTC and NJTPA in 2013 while preparing their respective long-range RTPs for the 2015-2040 period alone will be examined and critiqued upon.
3.5 Conceptual Model of Public Participation

A conceptual model of public participation is proposed to provide the framework for analyzing the “public outreach” exercises identified above. The model describes the elements of a public participatory exercise as it would apply to the MPO-led RTP planning process described in the earlier sections. Figure 3.2, seen below, represents the structural approach that emphasizes the interlinkages between the governance structure, the planning process and the public participatory exercise.

Figure 3.2 Structural Dimensions of Public Participation Activities

Taking a leaf out Innes and Booher (2004), “participation should be understood as a multi-way set of interactions among citizens and other players who together produce outcomes”, the agency-led regulatory public participation is conceptualized as a governance activity involving the MPO, its regional governance partners and the public. Towards advancing the idea that agency-led public participation is contingent on fostering connections with regional governance partners, the horizontal (intraregional) and vertical (higher and lower levels of governance) linkages that the MPO brings into or leaves out of play have been included in the model.
As will be discussed in the following pages, a MPO planning a public participatory exercise for its regulatory planning process will need to tackle three elements of participation: connection, content, and activity. Each element of public participation is composed of procedural/micro and structural/macro dimensions. In table 3.2 which presents the framework for analyzing public participation, each row corresponds to an element of the conceptual model with the micro/procedural dimensions presented in the column next to it. The macro/structural dimensions of most direct relevance are presented in the column next to the micro/procedural dimensions. Though the structural dimensions are presented in columns specific to an element, given the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Participation Elements</th>
<th>Procedural (Micro) Dimensions</th>
<th>Structural (Macro) Dimensions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Direct MPO-public connections</td>
<td>Digital Linkages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partnered MPO-public connections involving regional governance partners; contingent on the MPO’s regional connectedness (its capacity to establish and leverage horizontal connections)</td>
<td>Power asymmetries in MPO’s organizational structure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intraregional (Horizontal) Linkages</td>
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<td>State/Federal/Local (Vertical) Linkages</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Resources, human, time, financial</td>
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<td>Content</td>
<td>Messaging for enhancing relatability of regional issues</td>
<td>Plan content</td>
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<td>Planning process</td>
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<td>Legislations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Convening capacity – regional, cumulative</td>
<td>MPO Organizational Structure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Convening mode – synchronous, asynchronous</td>
<td>Planning process</td>
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strong interlinkages between the governance structure and the planning process on the public participatory exercise they have a global influence on all elements of public participation. Scale impacts all the components and dimensions of the model.

1. **Connection** – public participation in a RTP planning process is contingent on connecting with a region’s residents. In the absence of connection with a region’s residents, there is no possibility of participation of any kind. Direct connection between the MPO and an interested resident is one type of connection. Connections established through dedicated websites, social media platforms, email listserv subscriptions and print media such as flyers, posters, advertisements etc., are examples of direct connections between a MP and the regional public. Partnered connections, such as those of place, issue, or community, between the agency and residents are also possible but require “governance partners” such as nonprofits, community based organizations, institutional or sectoral partners. As no one structure can connect a MPO to the entire region, a combination of direct and mediated connections is usually adopted.

**Macro dimensions** – a MPO’s vertical linkages with higher and lower levels of government impacts its capacity to establish and leverage connections with regional governance partners (Foster and Barnes 2012; Nelles 2013). A MPO with no serious power asymmetries in its organizational structure is free to establish and leverage connections with regional governance partners. The availability of resources (human, time, and financial) determines how far and wide the connections are, geography and population wise.

2. **Content** – content is the material that the “connected” public engage with. Regional issues are large-scale, complex, sometimes abstract and difficult to relate to (examples include
socially and economically sustainable land use decisions, resilience and adaptation to climate change) necessitating appropriate messaging techniques to make the regional relatable.

**Macro Dimensions** – The content presented in a participatory session is derived from the RTP/TIP plan content (see section 3.1), mandated by federal legislation. The planning process and content are closely related; the planning process that the public participatory session is part of is put together to result in the contents of the federally mandated plan.

3. **Activity** – the activity that the “connected” public engage in. As this is a scale-centered thesis, the participatory activity will be examined for its capacity to convene people as a region (Meck 2002). This is crucial as regional planning stresses an overall view of problems applicable to the entire metropolitan area, a view that is different and distinct from the sum of its governmental parts. MPOs face criticism for adopting an aggregative planning process that undermines their regional function. A regional convening capacity is also important to ensure that beyond the evidence of facts and technical information *people perceive and own the region.*

**Macro Dimensions** – MPOs have an aggregative approach to planning which is carried over while structuring public participatory sessions during plan preparation. While this keeps the planning process contention free, it also means that a MPO’s plan lacks a regional voice and viewpoint independent of its constituent members. The following chapter will discuss how “funding formulas”, federal approaches to redistributing funds to states, play a key role in shaping an aggregative approach to regional transportation planning.
3.5 Case Studies – NYMTC and NJTPA in the Tristate Metropolitan Region

The RTP related public participatory exercises of two MPOs, the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) and the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) of the Tristate metropolitan region will serve as case studies for the thesis. The USDOT’s database of MPOs (USDOT, n.d.) reveals considerable variety within the 420 MPOs in the country - as of the 2010 Census, they range from 34 to 38,649 square miles in area serving anywhere between 42000 people to 18 million people. NYMTC (2726 sq. miles) serving a population of 12.3 million and NJTPA (4410 sq. miles) serving a population of 6.5 million rank as the second and fifth most populous MPOs of the country. In contrast, the region’s three other MPOs, the Greater Bridgeport / Valley MPO (203 sq. miles), the Housatonic Valley MPO (337 sq. miles) and the South Western MPO (216 sq. miles) with populations of 406161, 224621 and 363963 respectively serve a mere million people between themselves. NYMTC is not only the second most populous MPO but also the nation’s densest at 4534 persons per square mile. The NJTPA planning area is relatively sparser at 492 persons per square miles. Figure 3.2 presents the counties comprising NYMTC and NJTPA overlaid over the New York-Newark, NY-NJ-CT urbanized area.
Figure 3.2 Counties that constitute the NYMTC and NJTPA


3.6 Data Collection Methods

The following are the data collection methods adopted for the case studies:

1. Literature review of publications, reports and website content of the NYMTC, the NJTPA, Regional Plan Association (RPA), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the U.S. Department of Urban Development (HUD); media articles on regional and transportation planning issues of national and regional interest from the New York Times, Politico, The Observer, Planning, etc.

2. Eight formal interviews with NYMTC, NJTPA, NYC DOT, NYC DCP and RPA office bearers\(^9\).

3. First-hand observation of public outreach activities conducted by NYMTC and NJTPA - a public workshop conducted in October 2016 by NYMTC for a Mobility and Safety Planning project and a regional symposium hosted in Nov 2016 by NJTPA to kickoff RTP Plan 2045 planning process.

4. Approximately 20 informal discussions conducted with public workshop and symposium attendees.

3.7 Research Questions

The overarching research question of the thesis is how does scale affect the function and structure of public participation in planning processes? The sub questions presented below capture the underlying threads of inquiry.

\(^9\) Interview details are included in Appendix B.
• What are the problems associated with replicating community-scale participatory processes at the metropolitan regional scale?
• What are the potential advantages of restructuring public participation for the regional scale?
• What would be the foundational principles of public participatory structures that meet the unique needs of metropolitan regional planning?

This chapter outlined the rationale for adopting a structural approach to public participation, identified the MPO as the regional governance structure and the RTP as the planning process that would serve as the context in which the conceptual model and framework for analyzing public participation in metropolitan regional planning would be applied. The RTP related public participatory exercises of two MPOs of the NY-NJ-CT metropolitan region, the NYMTC and the NJTPA, serve as case studies.

Chapter 4 will present the structural issues that affect the MPO’s approach to designing and implementing public participatory practices in metropolitan transportation planning process. Current nationwide issues in MPO-led planning and governance, continuing federal efforts to refine the metropolitan transportation planning process and the fallout of those efforts on NYMTC and NJTPA are presented to establish the context within which NJTPA and NYMTC plan for and facilitate public participation in the metropolitan transportation planning process.
Chapter 3 outlined the rationale for adopting a structural approach to public participation and described the conceptual model and framework for analyzing the RTP-related public participatory exercises conducted by the NYMTC and the NJTPA. The model emphasizes the value of studying the interlinkages between the governance structure, the planning process and public participatory exercise for advancing public participation in regional planning activities. Accordingly, a glimpse into the current state of affairs in metropolitan transportation planning in the New York – New Jersey – Connecticut region (the NY-NJ-CT or Tristate region) is necessary to frame subsequent descriptions of NYMTC’s and NJTPA’s RTP-related public participation exercises. Prior to that, as the NJTPA and the NYMTC serve a common region and share a common history, a short description of historical events pertaining to regional planning from the 1960s through 1980s is provided below.

4.1 The Tristate Metropolitan Region between the 1960s-1980s

Infamously called the region of “2179 local governments” (Benjamin and Nathan 2001) the tristate region is no stranger to regional planning. However, regional initiatives of local origin, such as the consolidation of New York City in 1898 and the creation of the Regional Plan Association in 1922, remain the region’s lasting and most successful. Federal initiatives have been less successful and the region’s reactions to failed initiatives prove instructive of the concerns that present day regionalist initiatives contend with.

Following the passing of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962, the New York metropolitan region saw the creation of the Tri-State Transportation Committee to administer the region’s 3-C
transportation planning process (Heanue, 2007). Though not the first effort to recognize the tristate extent of the New York metropolitan region – the Regional Plan Association had done so since its inception in 1922 (RPA, n.d) – the Committee was the first initiative with the legal mandate to plan for the tristate region. With the passing of the 1973 Federal-Aid Highway Act, the Tri-State Transportation Committee, now renamed the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission, became a comprehensive regional planning agency reviewing federal investment in housing, land use, pollution control and transportation for the tristate region. By the end of 1970's, consensus was growing that the review process administered by the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission had become too complex, cumbersome and ineffective (Solof, 1998) and the Commission faced criticism from both pro-local and pro-regional fronts in the region.

A flurry of articles in The New York Times from the early 1980s present the sentiments felt at that time. The article, “Tristate: 'New Directions'”\(^\text{10}\) notes the formation of a task-force appointed by the Governors of the three states to investigate "mounting criticism as an unnecessary layer of government ". The Governors' Task Force on the Future of the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission, called for two principal changes – reduced absenteeism from the commission’s leadership and the formation of a subgroup, the Tri-State Regional Forum, to improve response to the "needs of the region's communities", hinting at the disconnect between the Commission and the region’s local leadership and governments. Another article, “Move To Quit Tristate Group Could Be Costly”\(^\text{11}\) notes that “the agency should focus more of its attention on long-


range planning and less on paperwork.” The article adds “the agency has never won any popularity contests among local officials and state legislators, particularly in the Counties of Connecticut and New Jersey, where the towns generally resent any outside agency telling them how to plan or zone.” A third article, “Tri-State's Demise Leaves Gap in Planning”¹² states that the Regional Plan Association, which had urged creation of the commission in the 1960's, said it failed to deal with regional development problems and accused its staff of avoiding "hard issues".

The Commission’s Executive Director Frank Johnson, defended the need for a regional layer of governance by noting, “There is a commonality of problems like pollution, water resources and flood control that flood across state lines - if you'll pardon the pun - and must be looked at from a regional perspective for long-range decisions.”

The competing concerns of three states often led to acrimony and gridlock in investing available federal aid; in 1982, disputes over land use focusing on the provision of region wide affordable housing (Schulze, Nov 2016) led to the disbanding of the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission (NJTPA 2016; NYMTC 2016). The disbanded commission was replaced by five new MPOs, NYMTC and NJTPA being two of them - the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC), the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA), the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO), the South-Western Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (SWRMPO), and the Greater Bridgeport/Valley MPO (GB/VMPO). Interestingly, Connecticut, the first state to exit the Commission, expressed support for a “leaner” regional agency. Written after the disbanding of the Commission, the NY Times article, “Tri-State's Demise Leaves Gap in Planning” refers to Connecticut Governor

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William A. O'Neill’s support for a new agency that would concentrate on substantive planning issues, not Federal funds. It also refers to support from Connecticut’s Office of Policy and Management for “a very lean operation that focuses on strategic issues and is not an unwieldy bureaucracy requiring complicated compliance reporting”.

Sections 4.3 and 4.4 present the reactions of the NJTPA, NYMTC and a few Tristate transportation advocacy organizations to a new federal rule on MPO consolidation sponsored by the USDOT. The discussions (conducted between June –October 2016) presented in these sections demonstrate the persistence of some of the concerns noted above, importantly, the need for responsiveness to local governments, reducing bureaucratic complexity and improving intergovernmental coordination.

Section 3.5 described the Tristate region’s travails under the stewardship of the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission from 1965 to 1982. The key takeaways from that experience follows below. Subsequent sections of this chapter will illustrate the ways in which some of the attitudes and ideologies that contributed to the 1980s’ experience still linger in MPO governance and transportation planning in the Tristate region.

4.2 Key Takeaway from the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission Experience

Two related problems from the 1980s persists to this day– a lack of political consensus for sustaining the momentum required for intergovernmental initiatives and a lack of influential regional forums dedicated to tackling cross jurisdictional issues and making them part of the regional public discourse. A multistate arrangement composed of the five constituent MPOs of the erstwhile Tristate Regional Planning Commission called the Metropolitan Area Planning (MAP) Forum was established in 2008 at the behest of the FHWA and FTA (HEP...
However, it remains a loosely structured forum facilitating interagency coordination over ‘soft issues’ such as data exchange and boundary projects without much momentum on historically “hard issues” like investments in mixed-use and affordable housing units. The reasons for the forum’s “soft” performance – a lack of political consensus and the persistence of divisions along state lines - is verified by NYMTC’s comments while responding to a new federal rule proposing to consolidate MPOs serving parts of the same Urbanized Area (UZA). NYMTC considered “the existing county and river boundaries are more logical than the UZA that tends to cross municipal, county and even state lines” (NYMTC 2016).

Section 4.3 presents the rule and related public comments in greater detail. Reiterating the criticality of political consensus for multi-state regional initiatives, NYMTC suggested,

> “in a multi-state urbanized area, MPA boundaries should not cross state lines except where Governors and their respective Legislatures approve the establishment of a multi-state MPA. Without such an exception in place, we fear that metropolitan planning could be indefinitely paralyzed in the NY-NJ-CT UZA due to lack of political consensus in the new MPA.” (NYMTC 2016)

In an interview for the *Politico* article, “City Names its First Regional Planning Director” published in May 2016, NYC Regional Planning Director Carolyn Meagher acknowledges the persistence of divisions along administrative and state boundaries in the Tristate region.

> “there’s sort of a history, over and over, of the region realizing it has shared problems and challenges that span the confines of our little political jurisdictions, and then lacking the capacity and sustained momentum to continue to work together on those shared challenges.” (Meagher 2016)

Despite no dearth of issues requiring regional solidarity, “regional growth patterns, the linkage between housing and transportation, and sustainability”, it appears intergovernmental cooperation, the crux of regionalism, is not easily realized because the tristate region is “stuck in the way our governments are shaped” (Meagher, Nov 2016).
4.3 Present Day Impressions of NJTPA’s and NYMTC’s Planners and Executives on Regionalism in the Tristate Region

Though present day planners and executives of regional planning agencies in the tristate region emphasize the intergovernmental character of regional planning, there are subtle differences in their approaches to it. Some of them emphasize the managerial, coordinative nature of regional planning carried out by MPO professional staff (Garcia, Oct 2016; Bogacz, Oct 2016; Meagher, Nov 2016). Others speak of the need for perseverance and a capacity for persuasion akin to that of advocacy, “it is a tough topic because people talk regionalism but don’t act regionalism” (Silver 2016); “This is a culture change. The only way you change the culture is you must begin to put that message out there to as many people as you can” (Holt, Nov 2016). NJTPA executive director Mary K. Murphy notes the agency’s most valuable work lies in “encouraging local municipalities to promote transit oriented development” (NJTPA 2016). Still others (Osborne, Oct 2016; Schulze, Nov 2016) remark on the need for skills required of any planner - political acumen and nimble negotiating skills to advance causes within tightly regulated processes.

Acknowledging that not every county administration in her 13-county MPA was interested in participating in voluntary regional initiatives such as the Together NJ project she was hopeful that “they will after seeing how it has benefitted those who do”. When faced with such lack of interest, “we (the Together NJ partnership) held focus group discussions with county officials to understand what it would take for them to engage regionally” (Murphy, Nov 2016).

Silver (2016) emphasizes the “need to make an economic case for planning as a region”, an integral part of regionalist advocacy, a view shared by NJTPA Executive Committee member and Hunterdon County Freeholder Matthew Holt. Before declaring, “in my county there is not
one group that does not get it (the relevance of regional planning)” Holt admits that the Great Recession of 2008 was a catalyst for making the message more urgent.

“Hunterdon County has been through recessions before but the impact to our residents had never been as severe as the last. We finally had this culture change where people are beginning to understand we had no alternative. Once we put the data together which happened through our CEDS (the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) formulated by the Together NJ partnership), it gave us a blueprint in time to say this is where you are, these are your issues as they relate to the four components of the RPSD and here are some suggestions on what to do”. (Holt, Nov 2016)

4.4 Current Issues in Metropolitan Transportation Planning in the Tristate Region

In their book Regionalism and Realism (Brookings Institution Press 2001), Benjamin and Nathan describe the Tristate region as “one place in three states”, composed of localities that operate within three distinct state systems of law and regulation. They also pay special attention to the diversity and multiplicity of local governments and public agencies in the region – numbering 2179 at that time. This point features prominently in current day discussions as well. Be it NYMTC Regional Planning Director Gerry Bogacz (Oct 2016), NYC Regional Planning Director Carolyn Meagher (Nov 2016), or NJTPA Executive Director Mary K. Murphy (Nov 2016), regional planners and executives in the tristate region begin conversations about metropolitan transportation planning by referring to the multiple governmental agencies involved in it. The MPO governance structure is such that MPOs are coordinators and consensus builders for federal fund apportionment rather than traditional policymaking (Sciara 2005). In addition to the local governments in its planning area, the MPO must involve local transportation providers in the planning process by including transit agencies, state and local highway departments, airport authorities, maritime operators, rail-freight operators, Amtrak, port operators and private providers of public transportation. The agency does not implement the transportation project priorities it establishes for the region but works closely with the
transportation systems and service operators who typically own and implement the projects identified in the TIP (HEP 2015). There are other reasons for underscoring the governmental complexity inherent in regional planning. The multi-layered and overlapping jurisdictions of the region’s local governments and public agencies serve to explain the inefficiency and inequities in regional service delivery (Benjamin and Nathan 2001), themes that frequently feature in the region’s media and public discussion. An excerpt from Stephen Miller’s article in *The Village Voice*, “Is Tri-State Transportation Too Big to Plan?”[^13], illustrates the point.

> Any commuter will tell you it’s not easy to get around the New York area. Taking the train from Newark to White Plains requires two separate tickets, plus a schlep between Grand Central and Penn Station. Most East River bridges are free, while tunnels just blocks away charge a toll. Train and bus riders use different fare cards, depending on the system, instead of tapping a single card across the entire region. Not surprisingly, there’s no one in charge of coordinating it all.”

Miller (2016) adds that the Tristate region is not alone in lacking a single coordinating agency for metropolitan transportation services; nationwide, whether in North Carolina’s Charlotte or California’s San Francisco metropolitan region, expanding suburbs create their own MPOs instead of joining the existing one focused on the region’s core. As a result, much to the regional public’s frustration, it is common for multiple MPOs to plan for and coordinate a region’s transportation services in a fragmented manner.

The newly passed Metropolitan Planning Organization Coordination and Planning Area Reform rule (Fed. Reg. 81 FR 41473) is an example of a recent USDOT effort to tackle the much-lamented lack of coordination in metropolitan transportation planning. A summary of the rule’s proposals follows. Contending that the intent for a typical metropolitan planning structure is to have a single MPO per urbanized area, the rule requires multiple MPOs serving a single

urbanized area (akin to the five MPOs that serve the Tristate region) to either merge or work together to draft a single unified transportation plan. Such consolidated MPOs will develop a single long-range metropolitan transportation plan, a single short-range transportation improvement program (TIP), and a jointly established set of performance targets for the entire urbanized area and contiguous area expected to become urbanized within a 20-year forecast period for the transportation plan. Confirming Miller’s observation regarding nationwide fragmented metropolitan transportation planning, the rule anticipates that MPOs across the nation may need to adjust their boundaries, consider mergers, or, coordinate with other MPOs to create unified plans for the MPA.

4.5 NYMTC and NJTPA discuss scale with respect to public involvement and TIP preparation

The comments submitted by NYMTC and NJTPA and two regional transportation policy and advocacy organizations of the Tristate region, the Tristate Transportation Campaign (TSTC) and the Institute of Rational Urban Mobility (IRUM) during the rule’s public review periods in June 2016 and October 2016 provide a ringside view of the operational issues of concern for NYMTC and the NJTPA. Some sections of the media were optimistic about the federal rule remarking that it could “unify the New York region’s jumble of official transportation plans into a single vision for the entire metropolitan area” (Miller, 2016). However, the MPOs themselves were not in favor of MPO consolidation in the Tristate region citing past failures and the logistical difficulties of coordinating a region extending across three states.

Both NYMTC and NJTPA claimed MPO consolidation would make the metropolitan planning process more cumbersome and inefficient. NJTPA (2016) noted, “the tristate region has seen firsthand how metropolitan planning on the scale envisioned by the new rule will be difficult at
best and completely dysfunctional at worst”. NYMTC (2016) anticipated “enormous diseconomies of scale” and “enormous megaregional expense” from the move to develop unified plans for such a megaregion. Two issues of relevance to this thesis- public involvement and TIP preparation - featured prominently in their comments. Excerpts of NYMTC’s and NJTPA’s comments follow.

4.5.1 Impact on Public Involvement and Outreach

Public outreach and agency coordination would become costlier as the number of meetings with the public and Board members at accessible locations to meet federal requirements for public involvement would dramatically increase. Currently each MPO follows its own public involvement plan (PIP) reflecting its planning area’s unique geographical and political contexts. This context specificity would be lost if a standardized PIP were to replace it. (NYMTC 2016)

Meaningful public outreach on documents that take a regional, long range approach to metropolitan transportation planning is already very challenging in a region like the NJTPA’s. Developing a common plan for a much larger, even more diverse region likely would lead to a decrease in public involvement and a growing disconnect between the people of the NJTPA region and their designated regional planning entity. (NJTPA 2016)

Why should an increase in planning area and development of a common plan mean a decrease in public involvement? What would bring about a public-agency disconnect in such circumstances? How does NYMTC impart context specificity to its public involvement exercises? These questions raise issues fundamental to the design of participatory structures in regional settings.

4.5.2 Impact on TIP preparation

The region’s MPO partners are hard-pressed to envision a workable process as currently each MPO follows its own process for developing its plan and TIP with written agreements assigning roles and responsibilities for development of the plans. Renegotiating the agreements with a greater number of elected officials, developing new governance, decision making and operating procedures would only make the process more complex. (NYMTC 2016)
If a common TIP is required between MPOs serving a contiguous planning area, presumably all the MPOs involved would need to approve any and all modifications and amendments to the TIP. This would add unnecessary layers of approval and time to the planning process. This would lead to absurd situations as the need for NYMTC to approve funding for a minor interstate repair or resurfacing project in a part of NJTPA’s region and vice versa. This requirement would make an already complex and often slow-moving process even less nimble and in the case of multi-state plans, create an environment where an MPO in one state can delay a project in another” (NJTPA 2016)

The prioritization of local projects by the agencies is notable. It is interesting that the agencies do not see this as an opportunity to piece together a cross jurisdictional project but raise the issue of local versus regional stake to dissuade consolidation. There is a strong managerial opposition to the idea of working with other agencies.

Advocacy organization TSTC anticipated decision making “gridlock” arising from the need to coordinate complex and differing state political environments and reconciling differing state land use and transportation authorities (TSTC 2016). Supporting TSTC’s remark about the Tristate region’s unwieldiness, IRUM suggests an alternate structure for unifying the NY-NJ-CT region (IRUM 2016). IRUM identified the existing Metropolitan Area Planning (MAP) Forum, composed of five MPOs that constituted the erstwhile Tri-State Regional Planning Commission, as a suitable coordinating entity for the region. Noting that the career paths of state DOT employees loaned out to MPOs tended to influence planning outcomes in the region, IRUM also made a case for independently staffing and funding the coordinating forum.

This observation brings the following two issues of significance to the MPO-facilitated transportation planning process to the fore.

4.6 Impact of Lack of Independent Revenue Sources on MPO Staffing and Organizational Capacity

MPOs may have the mandate to prepare long term investment plans and determine short term investments for a metropolitan region but do not raise revenues of their own (Sciara 2005). This
has resulted in significant flexibility in how a metropolitan region may host and staff its MPO (Meck, 2002). NYMTC is hosted by the NYSDOT and staffed with employees of the NYSDOT while the NJTPA, hosted by the state-owned New Jersey Institute of Technology, is staffed independently. Since the time of the interstate highway construction, State DOT’s have resisted devolving power to regional planning agencies (Heanue 2007; Table 3.1 traces the uneasy relationship between State DOTs and regional planning agencies in chronological detail) and it is understandable that NYMTC staffed with NYSDOT employees should lack credibility within the region. IRUM’s call for independently funding and staffing a consolidated MPO, should it come to be, underscores NYMTC’s diminished capacity for independent action. However, research demonstrates this problem has not remained unaddressed in the nation - State DOT hosting of MPOs had dramatically reduced from 42% in 1972 to 3% by 1994 (Sciara 2005). This suggests that NYMTC’s diminished capacity for independent action, the impact of its staffing plight on the RTP public participatory exercise (described in section 5.5), due to State DOT hosting is an isolated case and indicative of persistent NYSDOT interest in New York City’s transportation sector. The persistence of NYSDOT interest in NYC also indicates that divisions along administrative and state boundaries in the region, surmised earlier, are not the only impediments for establishing and sustaining the momentum for a regional forum in NYMTC’s planning area. NYMTC’s planning area contains five of the six counties that make up the urban core of the Tristate region. This undoubtedly makes NYMTC’s mandated planning activities a high-stake political activity leaving it less amenable to the broad-based regional (suburban county-level) participation witnessed in NJTPA’s planning area. NJTPA has forged ahead on establishing itself as a regional forum in North Jersey featuring active engagement of its constituent local county governments. In the agency’s comments to the
MPO consolidation rule, NJTPA “prides itself on the active involvement of its Board members which has been repeatedly recognized by the USDOT as a best practice in Certification Review findings” (NJTPA 2016). The implications of NJTPA’s regional connectedness and NYMTC’s lack thereof on their respective approaches to implementing public participation in RTP preparation are examined in chapter 5. Table 4.0 summarizes the governance capacity of NYMTC and NJTPA based on Nelles (2013) framework for regional governance capacity identified in section 2.9.

Table 4.0 Comparison of NYMTC and NJTPA’s Regional Governance Capacity

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<th>Dimensions of Governance Capacity:</th>
<th>NYMTC</th>
<th>NJTPA</th>
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<td>1. Horizontal – the degree to which the MPO is able coordinate activity in its region</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Vertical – the degree to which the MPO through partnership structures is effective actors in multilevel policy</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Governance Capacity:</th>
<th>NYMTC</th>
<th>NJTPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Maximize resources through regional partnerships</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Autonomy from other levels of government</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Perceived legitimacy through capacity for independent action</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 4 presented the regional planning history of the Tristate region beginning with the region’s failed experience with comprehensive regional planning before the institution of the NYMTC and the NJTPA in 1982. The lingering lack of regional leadership, political consensus and influential regional forums dedicated to tackling cross-jurisdictional, especially
interstate, issues have proven impediments for comprehensive regional governance in the Tristate region. The NJTPA and NYMTC despite being neighboring MPOs that share a common regional legacy have responded differently to the region’s dynamics and evolved to be MPOs with divergent organizational characteristics and regional impact. The implications of the difference in organizational dynamics and capacity on NJTPA’s and NYMTC’s RTP “public outreach” (NJTPA 2013a; NYMTC 2013a) exercises are addressed in chapter 5. A description of the two agencies’ “outreach” activities followed by an analysis based on the analytical framework described in chapter 3 follows in chapter 5.
Chapter 4 presented nationwide issues in metropolitan transportation planning; some of the tristate region’s specific troubles, as well as NJTPA and NYMTC’s contrasting standing in their respective administrative regions. The implications of the difference in organizational dynamics and capacity on NJTPA’s and NYMTC’s RTP “public outreach” (NJTPA 2013, NYMTC 2013b) exercises are addressed in the following sections. A description of the two agencies’ “outreach” activities followed by an analysis based on the analytical framework described in chapter 3 follows later.

5.1 Analysis of NJTPA and NYMTC’s Planners and Executives on Public Participation in Regional Planning

At the outset, opinions about public participation in metropolitan transportation planning are not promising. A recent publication of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development notes that several communities do not perceive MPOs as community and stakeholder-engagement oriented (Sustainable NYCT 2014a). Chapter 4 dedicated to framing the context began with a brief history of regional planning in the tristate region between the 1960s and 1980s followed by present day impressions of NJTPA and NYMTC’s planners and executives on regionalism. This chapter dedicated to the public participatory procedures begins with NJTPA and NYMTC’s planners and executives’ opinions about public participation.

New York City’s regional planning director is doubtful that the public play a role in regional planning at all; she holds the view that regional governance is an intergovernmental activity characterized by representative public participation (Meagher November 10, 2016). NYMTC’s
planning director is wont to be dismissive, “the public is not interested in anything that is not local” (Bogacz Oct 2016). In contrast, NJTPA’s executive committee members see the public as the “drivers of a culture change towards regionalism” (Holt Nov 2016).

Section 4.5.1 of chapter 4 revealed that NJTPA considers public involvement “challenging” (NJTPA 2016). The agency’s executive director Mary K. Murphy admits to grappling with questions such as “how do we reach people? how do we engage people? how do we get meaningful input from participatory processes? These are things we are grappling with”. She explains why:

“Professional citizens are able and interested in attending meetings at a MPO’s office. But often, we need to take our message to the public and not expect folks to come to us. Not to mention that the next generation of millennials does not come to meetings - we have to find ways to engage them. So we are hard at work mining for innovative ways to get out and engage the public.” Murphy (Nov 2016)

Reiterating NYMTC’s comment on the need for context-specific engagement efforts, Murphy stresses the need to work with sub regions (county governments) to determine engagement strategies that work best for each sub region (NJTPA has 14 sub regions, NYMTC has 10).

Suzanne Ishee (2016), member of the Stewardship Committee of the Scenic Wild Delaware River Geotourism Project (a nine-county project spread over three states – two counties in New Jersey, four counties in New York and three counties in Pennsylvania.) shared the project’s experience with engaging the regional public through social media.

“The project was intended to benefit 600 + businesses in the nine-county region but we were experiencing a lack of communication with the actual counties, the community members of these counties that can be serviced by this extraordinary project. We decided to focus our marketing efforts and our limited marketing dollars on social media. We cannot underestimate the power of social media in communicating, particularly with next generations. They do go on it, they do follow it, they do respond to it. So, that’s where our focus is right now. Because it costs us virtually nothing to do that.” Ishee (2016)
Osborne (Oct 2016) considers the ‘just process’ approach - “we assure the public their views will be considered” (Bogacz Oct 2016) – ineffective. He stresses the relevance of context and culture by observing that participatory approaches were more embedded in the day to day functioning of planning agencies in the west coast when compared to NYCDOT (Osborne was previously employed with San Francisco’s Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART)). NYMTC’s former executive director Tom Schulze (Nov 2016) presents public participation as a two-way learning opportunity for the planners and the public to understand each other and work together.

Can a single yardstick suffice for evaluating the eclectic mix of opinions on public participation presented above? The diversity of opinions validates the assemblage of questions presented in section 2.1 for understanding public participation. It is notable that each opinion presented above while representing a facet of public participation does not meet all the objectives outlined in section 2.1.

5.2 Public Participation in NJTPA’s RTP (Plan 2040) planning process

Public outreach for NJTPA’s Plan 2040 was conducted in the spring of 2013, in tandem with the public outreach activities of Together New Jersey’s (TNJ) Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD). As a member of the Executive Committee of Together North Jersey, the NJTPA was actively involved in developing the RPSD and collaborated with TNJ to facilitate 14 public workshops around the region. The NJTPA was also involved in preparing technical papers and data for the RPSD, elements of which were incorporated into Plan 2040. This led to the decision to combine the outreach for Plan 2040 with that of Together NJ. While this presented logistical and organizational advantages to NJTPA, it was also advantageous for public outreach as the RTP was presented within the broader regional planning machinery at work in North Jersey.
For the “public outreach” exercises for the regulatory RTP, *Plan 2040*, the NJTPA employed a two-pronged strategy featuring, the “meet you where you live” series of face-to-face public workshops and the “in your home” digital platforms (NJTPA 2013). The *Plan 2040* document positions the outreach activities described below “as an opportunity for the residents to share the mobility challenges they face in the region and to reflect on their aspirations for their communities for the coming decades”. The following sections describe the outreach activities documented in the *Plan 2040* document.

**Face-to-face Outreach Component: Public Workshops**

The public workshops featured a series of interactive exercises designed to be “fun and enlightening for all members of the public, regardless of their expertise in planning matters” (NJTPA 2013). The presence of Spanish interpreters and “Kids Corners” at all workshops are highlighted as features reflecting NJTPA’s inclusivity and sensitivity. A description of the workshops follows -

1. Participants initially rotated through three stations each centered on one of the broad themes of “working, living, and getting around”. At these stations, they were asked to name something they liked, and something they would like to see changed about their communities with respect to the theme of the station.

2. Participants were involved in “dot-mocracy” exercises voting on a list of objectives categorized by the three themes working, living and getting around in their communities. Participants were given three stickers and asked to place them next to the goals that mattered the most to them; blank spaces were left for participants to add goals that did not appear on
the list. The number of dots a goal received was used to gauge its popularity, with a greater number of dots taken to represent greater priority. The following goals received top priority:

- Ensuring infrastructure (transportation, utilities and communications) is in good repair and can support economic development
- Connecting where people live with where they need to go
- Reducing potential impacts of climate change
- Reducing combined transportation and housing costs

3. The third simulation activity put attendees in charge of the region’s federal transportation dollars. Participants were given three to invest in jars representing transportation investment categories. The choices were bicycle/pedestrian, bridges, transportation demand management (carpool/vanpool/shuttles), freight, roads, safety, technology and transit. The participants invested the most in the transit, roads, and bicycle/pedestrian categories.

4. An interactive polling exercise featured two questions Plan 2040-related questions among others for Together NJ. The first question, “How should the region invest transportation dollars?” was similar to the bead exercise. The polling results closely reflected the results of the bead exercise with significant support for increased transit service, improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and fixing existing bridges and roads. The second question, “What sources of funds should be used to support transportation?” provided input on the types of funding mechanisms participants would support to pay for the priorities identified in the first polling question. Increasing the gas tax received the most support and ‘working with banks and businesses to share costs and revenues from tolls and fares,’ in other words some sort of public-private partnership (P3) arrangement, received broad support.
Digital Outreach Components

1. Dedicated project website: NJTPA hosted a dedicated website EngageNorthJersey.com for sharing resources and facilitating digital public engagement in the RTP. The website simulated the workshop activities and featured a discussion forum that allowed site visitors to discuss issues with each other. EngageNorthJersey.com allowed residents to suggest their ideas for improving the region and support, or “second,” good ideas suggested by others. There were provisions for leaving feedback or posting photos of places in northern and central New Jersey that they liked. MindMixer, a social media-like program developed for generating public input for community planning projects powered the site.

2. Social media platforms: NJTPA staff shared real-time tweets and photos with NJTPA’s followers to boost interest in future events and generate additional feedback from attendees. Conversations on social media were incorporated into the public input from other sources for Plan 2040.

3. A Plan 2040 web page was created and featured on the NJTPA’s website, NJTPA.org. The page served as a gateway for information related to both Plan 2040 and the Together North Jersey effort featuring links, flyers and promotional material related to upcoming public workshops.

4. Periodic updates on Plan 2040 and Together North Jersey were also shared via the NJTPA’s E-List email 10 regional system.
5.3 Public Outreach in NYMTC’s RTP (Plan 2040) planning process

NYMTC conducted public outreach for Plan 2040 over a two-month period between September 12 and October 17, 2012. Like NJTPA, NYMTC also adopted a two-fold outreach strategy composed of open-houses and internet-based outreach.

Face-to-face Outreach Component: Public Workshops

Public workshops were held to “solicit input from stakeholders and members of the public on the transportation needs of the region that would help to build on available information and lay the foundation for Plan 2040” (NYMTC 2013). The University Transportation Research Center (UTRC) assisted with this effort.

NYMTC organized ten public workshops/open houses in each of the ten counties within the NYMTC planning area. Each open house consisted of two sessions - the first session began at 4:15 PM and the second session at 6:30 PM to accommodate variable lifestyles of residents. One session from each round of workshops conducted in New York City was webcasted, archived, and made available to the public.

NYMTC staff gave a PowerPoint presentation at the beginning of each of the two sessions to give background information on NYMTC and the transportation planning process, and to discuss trends, forecasts, and current conditions. Participants were able to ask questions about any aspect of the process and to address specific issues or projects. These comments and questions were recorded for “consideration”. After the presentations, participants went around to five workshop stations that were staffed by NYMTC members. The stations replicated the same topic areas as the MindMixer online forum: Safety, Congestion, Mobility, Freight, and Environmental Justice. Each station used visualization and display materials such as maps, charts, aerial images, and
diagrams for conveying technical information related to each of the five topic areas. All of the visualization materials, including the presentation, were posted on the *Plan 2040* website to make them available for the public. Participants were also able to access the Mind Mixer interactive website at a computer kiosk, where they could submit comments and thoughts.

**Digital Outreach Components**

1. **Dedicated project website**: NYMTC launched an interactive website called MindMixer to engage site visitors, presumably regional residents, in a discussion forum. The website served as a platform which allowed visitors to submit an idea, revise and refine ideas, and create or join discussions on transportation issues. All visitors were required to sign up to join the site; the information was used to create a demographic profile of users. The website was designed around five chosen topics selected by the NYMTC advisory committee - safety, congestion, environment, freight, mobility, and general transportation issues. Through this platform, members of the public were also able to submit comments using Pinterest, Facebook, and Twitter. An analysis of the traffic on this interactive website indicated that NYMTC was able to engage a varied cross-section and a greater number of residents than during previous efforts to update the RTP.

2. **RTP Website**

NYMTC launched a dedicated RTP website for disseminating information on the *Plan 2040* preparation. The website provided access to RTP related publications and resources, the public involvement process, an events calendar, timeline of the *Plan 2040* project, contact information and links to the Mind Mixer interactive online forum.
5.4 Public participatory models of NJTPA and NYMTC

![Diagram showing public participatory models of NJTPA and NYMTC](image)

Figure 5.1 RTP Plan 2040 Public participatory models of NJTPA and NYMTC

Table 5.0 Comparison of NYMTC and NJTPA’s Regional Governance Capacity

(Reproduced from chapter 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of Governance Capacity</th>
<th>NYMTC</th>
<th>NJTPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Horizontal – the degree to which the MPO is able coordinate activity in its region</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Vertical – the degree to which the MPO through partnership structures is effective actors in multilevel policy</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Governance Capacity</th>
<th>NYMTC</th>
<th>NJTPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Maximize resources through regional partnerships</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Autonomy from other levels of government</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Perceived legitimacy through capacity for independent action</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.1 presents a visual comparison of the governance structures, planning processes and the public participatory processes adopted by NYMTC and NJTPA. Table 5.0 is re-presented in this
chapter to demonstrate the relationship between each agency’s regional governance capacity and its model for public participation. The following section expands on the interrelationship between the dimensions and sources of regional governance capacity.

5.5 NYMTC and NJTPA’s regional governance capacity

Every MPO has horizontal linkages within the region and vertical linkages across multiple levels of government. But as the contrasting case of NYMTC and NJTPA demonstrates, not all MPOs have the capacity to leverage these linkages to maximize their connections with the public. Both NJTPA and NYMTC were concurrently participating in the Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI) funded consortia of their region. Their participation in the consortia created horizontal linkages with other governance partners in the region who could facilitate greater and wider connections with the public. Yet, while NJTPA capitalized on that connection by integrating the public outreach activities of the RTP with the RPSD, NYMTC did not. What explains this behavior?

Recent research on regional governance suggests that effective regional governance actors exhibit a degree of autonomy - they are willing and capable of operating in ways beyond their prescribed planning functions and roles (Foster and Barnes 2012; Nelles 2013). Examined in this vein, NJTPA is acting with autonomy. It is exhibiting the capacity to leverage regional links, access regional resources, and coordinate regional activity. This action of NJTPA accrued multiple benefits:

- It demonstrated the value of regional partnerships as communication channels and networking platforms capable of supporting a MPO’s prescribed planning functions.
• It debunked the perceptions of insularity and lack of transparency historically ascribed to MPOs (section 4.3).

• It integrated regional planning activities, saved time and resources by not duplicating functions, and presented a relatable cohesive regional face to the public. Clearly, NJTPA is not negatively impacted by its horizontal or vertical linkages.

• But most importantly, by melding the public outreach activities of two different projects into one, NJTPA displayed the capacity to spot an opportunity and create the structure to make it happen which is characteristic of a visionary activity. NJTPA displayed nimble thinking, a sign of effective leadership and autonomy.

In contrast, NYMTC presents the picture of the insular MPO that operates with minimal regional connections. Despite being part of the New York-Connecticut Sustainable Communities Consortium (Together NJ’s counterpart in NYMTC’s planning area) there was no exchange of resources or expertise between the Agency and the Consortium. Regional Plan Association, the Consortium’s facilitator, developed a set of recommendations\textsuperscript{14} for enhancing public participation and implemented them during the RPSD preparation. Acknowledging that some of the recommendations are effective, NYMTC’s Planning Director points to the longstanding lack of a Public Information Officer (PIO) as the reason for the diminished quality of NYMTC’s public engagement exercise (Bogacz Oct 2016).

\textsuperscript{14} Recommendations for improving meaningful engagement in planning processes (Sustainable NYCT, 2014b): Including more community leaders and organizations in planning meetings and outreach; Using clear, non-technical language to describe problems and proposals; Providing materials in advance of meetings; Conducting more than one meeting on topics so individuals have an opportunity to think and confer about the issues and come back with responses and recommendations; Translating materials into languages other than English and providing interpreters at the meeting; Explicitly asking for concrete solutions, and not just problems; Providing timely feedback on how ideas are considered and used.
But, NYMTC’s vertical linkages are more worrisome. The state-run Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), one of NYMTC’s constituent members, dominates the Council paving the way for power asymmetry and lack of trust. Staffing troubles, such as lack of a much-needed PIO despite adequate funds to fill the position, are a consequence of the NYSDOT staffing freeze. The lack of a PIO has led to a significant loss of convening capacity - the Regional Planning Corps of community-based organizations, advocacy groups, local municipal governments, community boards and professional associations, which served as a distribution network for NYMTC was discontinued due to lack of a PIO. As noted by IRUM in section 4.4, staffing troubles impede NYMTC’s autonomy and governance capacity.

5.6 The Analytical Framework applied to NYMTC and NJTPA’s public outreach activities

The analytical framework presented in chapter 3 (reproduced below) identified three elements of a public participatory exercise and presented the corresponding micro and macro dimensions of the elements. Table 5.1 applies the framework to NYMTC and NJTPA’s public outreach activities.
Table 5.1 The Regional Public Participation (PP) Analytical Framework Applied to NYMTC and NJTPA’s Public Outreach Exercises

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PP Elements</th>
<th>Structural and Procedural Dimensions</th>
<th>NYMTC</th>
<th>NJTPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Procedural Dimensions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct MPO-public connection</td>
<td>Digital – Website, email listserv; webinar presentations</td>
<td>Digital – Website, email listserv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partnered MPO-public connections (involving regional governance partners)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes - Together NJ consortium partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Structural Dimensions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power asymmetries in MPO’s organizational structure</td>
<td>Yes, in favor of MTA and NYSDOT</td>
<td>Nothing major; relatively balanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intraregional (Horizontal) Linkages</td>
<td>Poor – facilitates public participation as a single agency</td>
<td>Good - facilitates public participation within a consortium; Strong sub-regional participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State/Federal/Local (Vertical) Linkages</td>
<td>Very strong NYSDOT linkage overrides other partners and diminishes capacity for independent action</td>
<td>Non-intrusive vertical linkages mediated by savvy leaders allow for local maneuvering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resources, human, time, financial</td>
<td>Does not optimize resources; replicates existing regional connections</td>
<td>Optimizes resources by leveraging existing regional connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5.1 The Regional Public Participation (PP) Analytical Framework Applied to NYMTC and NJTPA’s Public Outreach Exercises continued from page 73

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PP Elements</th>
<th>Structural and Procedural Dimensions</th>
<th>NYMTC</th>
<th>NJTPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>Messaging for enhancing relatability of regional issues</td>
<td>No; the accent on NYMTC’s coordinatory role distances participants</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do the participants perceive the region?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Participants partially perceive their subregion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do participants come out empowered with capacity to envisage and solve regional problems?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Partially; they can envisage sub regional problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structural Dimensions</strong></td>
<td>Plan content</td>
<td>RTP proposals conform to federal requirements only</td>
<td>RTP proposals adhere to TNJ’s Regional Plan &amp; policy framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning process</td>
<td>RTP planning occurs independently</td>
<td>RTP is nested with in and in tandem with TNJ’s regional planning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning context</td>
<td>Regulatory</td>
<td>Regulatory within a Visionary framework</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.1 The Regional Public Participation (PP) Analytical Framework Applied to NYMTC and NJTPA’s Public Outreach Exercises continued from page 74

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PP Elements</th>
<th>Structural and Procedural Dimensions</th>
<th>NYMTC</th>
<th>NJTPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Convening capacity – regional, cumulative</td>
<td>Digital RTP outreach is; face-to-face is not</td>
<td>Ongoing outreach is regional; Digital RTP outreach is; face-to-face is not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participatory approach</td>
<td>Aggregative</td>
<td>Aggregative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type of Participation</td>
<td>Passive; typically outreach, engagement, education</td>
<td>Passive; typically outreach, engagement, education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the activity convene participants as a region?</td>
<td>Outreach conducted for RTP does not</td>
<td>Outreach conducted for RTP does not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Convening mode – synchronous, asynchronous</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plan content</td>
<td>RTP</td>
<td>RTP + RPSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning process</td>
<td>RTP</td>
<td>RTP + RPSD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.7 The negative impact of distributive planning on regional cooperation

Section 3.1 introduced MPOs as a federal resource allocation mechanism by noting that the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 instituted MPOs for organizing transportation planning and directing investments in transportation infrastructure and services in metropolitan areas (NYMTC 2013a, NJTPA 2013). With the 1956 Highway Act, the federal government assumed a prominent role in generating and redistributing transportation revenues spurred by plans to construct the U.S. Interstate System (table 3.1). The project’s national scale demanded a redistributive strategy that ensured states lacking the resources to support the construction of the interstate system received the funds required to construct a continuous interstate system offering nationwide connectivity (Heanue 2007). By the mid- and late-1980s, with the interstate system largely complete, state support for redistributive allocation of federal transportation funds dwindled. As “donor states”, whose funds were redistributed to “donee states”, began to assert that the amount of federal gas tax dollars allocated to their states should be equivalent to the amount raised in their states, “donor-donee” issues played a prominent role in legislative debates surrounding the reauthorization of transportation spending bills (Sciara 2005). In the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991, the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21) in 1998, and the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005, Congress largely yielded to state pressure for equity based on return-to-source. From 2005 onwards, Federal government sends back to each state an amount only modestly different from what it collected from the state to begin with (HEP 2015).
States, in turn, have distributing formulas of their own, which determine the funds a MPO receives. HEP (2015) notes that although population is typically the main factor in determining distribution-funding formulas, other factors such as air quality, vehicles miles traveled and road miles, lane miles, transportation management area (TMA) designation are also significant. The most common practice is to allocate a standard base amount to cover a MPO’s planning and operational costs and apportion funds based on the factors mentioned earlier.

![Diagram of phases of a Metropolitan Transportation Planning Cycle](image)

**Figure 5.2 Phases of a Metropolitan Transportation Planning Cycle** (reproduced from chapter 3)

Typically, a combination of federal, state and local funds go towards funding a MPO approved project (NJTPA 2016b). The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a short-range schedule of projects and programs implementing the RTP over a five-year horizon. Figure 3.1 reproduced above presents the phases in the metropolitan transportation planning cycle. The RTP’s project index along with projects carried over from the previous TIP and local programs
comprise a preliminary TIP project pool. A rigorous prioritization process involving several rounds of negotiations between the sub regions vying for projects ensues. At the end of prioritization, a financial outlay describing the design, cost, sponsor and funding sources accompanies every project identified as a priority in the project pool. This fiscally constrained list of priority capital projects forms the TIP for the next four years. While the MTP (RTP) is approved by the MPO, the TIP as the primary funding mechanism needs to be approved by both the MPO and the Governor (HEP 2015). The negotiation and prioritization process casts local governments within a region as competitors for funds undermining the scope for regional cooperation. Furthermore, the resource allocatory purpose of the planning process lends public participation a decision-making focus negatively impacting its potential for collective capacity building and problem solving.

5.8 Messaging

Staying true to the aim of keeping the content accessible “regardless of expertise in planning matter”, NJTPA reframed the potentially abstract themes, “Competitive, Efficient, Livable and Resilient”, of the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development - RPSD (Together NJ 2015) into three relatable themes, “working, living, and getting around” (NJTPA 2013). This made the content and purpose of the RPSD and the RTP instantly relatable and effective for engaging participants.

In contrast, NYMTC’s messaging “enhancing the regional environment, improving the regional economy, improving the regional quality of life” and “Safety, Congestion, Mobility, Freight, and Environmental Justice” being abstract was hard to relate to. Reframing regional content to, more than locally, personally relatable content is crucial for engaging with the public.
Successful messaging for regional issues breaks down complex, large-scale issues into personally relatable issues. NJTPA’s messaging proves that when sufficiently demystified issues of any scale are relatable and can go a long way towards fostering public engagement with regional issues.

Role of Regional Leaders in Effective Messaging

New regionalist leaders, such as NJTPA executives and planners, show a capacity to meld the technical knowledge of planners with politically attractive immediacy in ways that connect with the everyday experiences of the public. This capacity plays a key role in making regional issues relatable. Such leaders embody the principle described in section 2.3.2, of planning as an interaction between political mandate, technical knowledge and experiential knowledge. They self-identify as a member of the public participating in a public activity and effectively bridge the public-agency divide by recognizing all governance actors as partners.

5.9 Convening Capacity

Convening capacity, in terms of population and extent, is an important differentiator between regional and local participatory exercises. Of NJTPA and NYMTC’s public outreach activities described in the preceding section, NJTPA’s regional symposiums and forums, which convene citizen professionals from the entire region, are the only form of synchronous activity to convene the public on a regional scale. The online MindMixer discussion forum does convene participants across the region but in an asynchronous mode.

In a break from tradition, in addition to facilitating regulatory public engagement exercises for its prescribed planning products, NJTPA pursues an ongoing regional convening agenda by
hosting symposiums and forums that periodically convene the region’s interested parties and citizen professionals. This is advantageous for a couple of reasons. First, it convenes diverse and far-flung stakeholders interested in regional cooperation and facilitates new horizontal connections within the regional community. As NJTPA’s success in reaching out to the regional public in collaboration with Together NJ demonstrates, intraregional (horizontal) connections between stakeholders and governance partners are key for successfully scaling public participation to a regional scale. Second, regional level convening serves as an effective capacity building exercise that educates and engages interested citizen professionals who can act as advocates for regional cooperation in their communities.

This concludes the analysis of NYMTC and NJTPA’s public participatory processes. The following key points of interest emerged from the analysis:

1. The negative impact of distributive planning on regional cooperation - the process of negotiation and prioritization encountered in RTP and TIP preparation casts local governments within a region as competitors for funds undermining the scope for regional cooperation. Furthermore, the resource allocatory purpose of the planning process lends public participation a decision-making focus negatively impacting its potential for collective capacity building and problem solving.

2. The critical role played by horizontal and vertical partnerships on MPOs regional governance capacity - the contrasting cases of NYMTC and NJTPA demonstrate that not all MPOs have the capacity to leverage vertical and horizontal partnerships positively in ways that maximize their connections with the regional public. Such partnerships assume greater significance in the context of MPO’s lack of independent funding sources.
3. The critical role played by leadership in fostering public engagement in regional planning processes – analysis reveals even in the absence of superfluous funds, MPOs with engaged leadership (as in the case of NJTPA) are capable of operating in ways beyond their prescribed planning functions and roles. By enlisting the assistance of regional planning partners, NJTPA leadership not only saved time and resources (by not duplicating functions), but also presented a relatable cohesive regional face to the public. Engaged leaders were skilled at messaging - breaking down complex, large-scale (regional) issues into personally relatable issues – while engaging the public.

These key points of interest inform the findings presented in chapter 6.
Chapter 6 Findings

The previous chapter began with a description of NJTPA and NYMTC’s public outreach activities and moved on to analysis by first presenting the public participation model of each agency. A compilation of NYMTC and NJTPA’s regional governance capacity framed the comparison of the public participatory exercises against the analytical framework developed in chapter 3. The results of the analysis, summarized as key points of interest in the end of chapter 5, form the basis of the findings presented in this chapter.

The structural approach demonstrates that lack of a direct relationship, such as a regional tax base or regional service provision, is an impediment to public perception of and active participation in regional governance. In the absence of opportunities for direct relationship with the regional public, engaged leadership and robust inter and intra-regional partnerships emerge as significant factors for fostering public participation in metropolitan transportation planning processes.

Distributive planning processes created for purposes of resource allocation are not designed to foster intergovernmental cooperation. As the NJTPA and NYMTC’s TIP project prioritization process demonstrates, distributive planning does the opposite, engendering competition amongst regional communities. This is detrimental for planning for broad based large-scale complex issues which require intergovernmental cooperation.
6.1.1 Messaging

Making RTP proposals (regional proposals) personally relatable is crucial for engaging with the public, especially as MPOs are not direct service providers. NJTPA’s leadership displays a capacity to persuasively communicate regional issues by melding the technical knowledge of planners with politically attractive immediacy in ways that connect with the everyday experiences of the public. NJTPA’s messaging for Together New Jersey’s Regional Plan and RTP Plan 2040 proves that when sufficiently demystified issues of any scale are relatable and can go a long way towards fostering public connection and engagement.

6.1.2 Convening Capacity

Convening capacity, in terms of magnitude of population and geographic extent is an important differentiator between regional and local participatory exercises. The capacity to bring together far flung and numerous stakeholders and interested public over an issue of interest is necessary to foster intraregional connections over common interests or goals. Short-term horizontal connections – such as intraregional cooperation over a project’s life cycle - are easier to establish than longer term connections. As NYMTC’s experience with the now defunct Regional Planning Corps demonstrates horizontal connections also tend to be resource intensive and hard to sustain without continued organizational support. They can quickly wither away when neglected.
6.2 Structural Dimensions

6.2.1 The Impact of Horizontal and Vertical Linkages on Regional Governance Capacity

Horizontal connections might be easy to establish but are hard to sustain without continued support. For example, NYMTC’s Regional Planning Corps of community-based organizations, advocacy groups, local municipal governments, community boards and professional associations, which served as a distribution network for NYMTC within the region was discontinued due to lack of a Public Information Officer. Regional partnerships are valuable as communication channels and networking platforms capable of supporting a MPO’s regulatory planning functions. They are valuable for opening opportunities for visionary initiatives and creating the necessary structures to support such projects. Organizational autonomy and leadership agency are prerequisites for such outcomes to eventuate, and those are areas most impacted by the quality of vertical linkages such as relationships with the state DOT or the state governor’s office.

6.2.2 NJTPA’s Approach to Scaling Public Participation

During the TNJ RPSD plan preparation phase, NJTPA conducted outreach towards two different audiences - one towards the public, the other towards county governments and municipalities in the region. This two-pronged strategy ensured local support for facilitating public outreach and is a successful strategy for scaling public participation. NYMTC planners agree that having county and local municipal support and perhaps, even having local officials facilitate the sessions would be effective in making regional plans relatable to the public. But it rarely happens because ideological and political differences between the state and county
administration often get in the way of garnering local support for NYMTC’s public engagement activities.

There is enough evidence to support the claim that MPOs would do well to enlist local support for connecting with the regional community. However, political and ideological differences do present a definitive barrier for extending local organizational and logistical support. For example, using county offices for public outreach (Bogacz Oct 2016) and RPA’s partnership with grass roots organizations (NY-CT Sustainable Communities Consortium 2014), strategies that help connect with communities and potentially continuing the conversation beyond the project phase are heavily dependent on leadership. In the absence of governmental partners, issue-based nongovernmental partners are a potential support structure for engaging with the public ((NY-CT Sustainable Communities Consortium 2014). In the absence of either support, a MPO tackles public engagement independently with diminished results, NYMTC’s experience being a case in point.

From the standpoint of efficiency, as reiterated in the Sustainable Communities Initiative, there is a need to avoid duplicating functions regionally. Local government – county governments, cities, or municipalities - remain unsurpassed in their capacity to connect with the public that if a regional agency were to do it, it would be duplicating functions already being performed effectively by local governments.

NJTPA’s practice for effective and efficient scaling of public participation regionally is very dependent on governance partners. Such governance support structures are hybrid
(intergovernmental and/or non-governmental), informal, and fluctuating requiring strong leadership and carefully nurtured regional connections.

6.2.3 Emergent Approach for Scaling Regional Governance

There is some support amongst the interviewees and literature for “the regionalization of local governance” (Schulze, Nov 2016) as an alternative to scaling regional planning processes using regional governance partners. Acknowledging the need for a solution that avoids duplication of functions and tackles the problem of fluctuating local government support, proponents of this approach recommend housing regional planners in local governments. The locally-housed regional planners will act as intergovernmental advocates supposedly facilitating consensus between a local government and its regional partners. Having a designated intergovernmental affairs advocate improves the capacity of local communities to engage regionally and broker intergovernmental support. As this approach works within existing political structures it is not seen as challenging of local government power.

New York City is the first local government in the United Stated to implement this approach. NYC’s move is touted as an acknowledgement that regional partnerships are a reality, not a choice.

6.2.4 Emerging Regional Governance Function - Intergovernmental Advocacy

Regardless of the scaling approach advocated, intergovernmental advocacy is suggested as an unavoidable regional governance function. The idea’s appeal lies in its ability to universalize the need for intergovernmental interaction in every scale of governance. It also represents a
generational shift away from the accent on regional coordination by a centralized intermediary, the vestige of a managerial “top-down” approach to regional governance. This shift is a potential boost for public participation because it acknowledges the need for

- connecting with regional partners (governmental, nongovernmental, and the public)

- acknowledging the value and role of diverse interests, and

- most importantly, creating channels of communication dependent on persuasive leadership in identifying allies, leveraging interests that foster partnerships, and leaving the door open for recalcitrant partners.

The economic crisis of 2009 and subsequent dwindling of federal dollars has unwittingly served as the current catalyst for regionalism. For the first time, a business case was made for interagency collaboration as a means to ensure every public investment serves multiple purposes (such as equitable access to public services, long-term employment, and increased resilience to a changing climate). NYC’s Regional Planning Director and NJTPA’s executives support the view that regional partnerships are a requirement not a choice.

The concluding section of chapter 5 summarized the following points of interest to foreground the findings presented in this chapter: the negative impact of distributive planning on regional cooperation, the critical role played by horizontal and vertical partnerships on MPOs regional governance capacity and, the critical role played by leadership in fostering public engagement in regional planning processes. From a procedural perspective, findings from NJTPA’s public outreach exercises emphasized the importance of messaging and convening capacity for
successfully engaging with the public on regional issues. Effective and engaged leadership emerged equally important as did the capacity of MPOs to leverage horizontal and vertical linkages for scaling public participation to a regional level. From a structural perspective, emergent approaches to scaling public outreach activities (such as NJTPA’s collaboration with intra-regional partners) demonstrated a shift from the traditional single-agency model towards collaborative multi-partner operations. Within the collaborative approach, intergovernmental advocacy – issue based cooperation between local governments - was observed as the emergent characteristic of contemporary regional governance practice. The following chapter 7 presents conclusions drawn from the findings presented in this chapter. As the concluding chapter of this document, it evaluates the degree to which the research questions raised in chapter 1 have been answered and presents ideas for further research.
Chapter 7 Conclusions

“think and act across historic boundaries, to teach us to think on a scale as large as the problem itself and act to prepare for the future as well as repair the past.” (President Johnson, Special Message to the Congress on the Nation’s Cities, March 2, 1965)

I began the introductory chapter 1 with a reminder that manifesting and channeling the social, cultural and economic desires of the public is one of the objectives of planning. Indeed, there is enough evidence to support an argument that this objective does not bear reminding. Many federal, state, and local laws mandate public participation in decision making about long-range planning, capital improvement programming, or major investment studies when public funds are involved (Federal Highway Administration 2005). In addition, there is “enormous and continuing accumulation of literature on public participation in planning” (Huxley 2013) suggesting public participation is by now not only a firmly embedded but also much researched planning practice.

I then proceeded to demonstrate how a review of literature on the topic shows a preponderance of research focused on public participation in local planning settings and noted the relative lack of recognition of scale as a factor in designing and incorporating public participation in planning processes. This is a cause for concern. As the human population becomes predominantly urban and metropolitan regions grow in significance as planning and governance entities, so does public participation in planning at that scale. This thesis bears evidence that while strong and renewed legislative support ensures the public its rightful place in metropolitan
planning, weaknesses in the current mechanisms and structures for public participation at that scale call for the attention of practitioners and academicians alike.

7.1 Making a case for social innovation as a structural counterpart to public participation

The case of metropolitan transportation planning, one of the longest running federal initiatives in regional planning in the United States, demonstrates that despite intentions to the contrary, a distributive planning approach focused on federal resource allocation to local communities has led to an unfortunate distancing of the public from regional planning and governance. That the legislative endorsement of and the subsequent procedural focus on public participation in planning have reduced public participation to an end in itself does not help matters. Consequently, governance structures and planning processes focused on decision making for resource allocation have come to prioritize public participation as an accessory to decision making undermining its potential for problem solving and social innovation.

Readjusting expectations from public participation to include social innovation can be valuable from a regional planning perspective as historically regionalism has faced criticism for advocating for the planning and governing communities in ways that challenge traditional political and administrative structures. The regionalist stance of cooperative local planning within a regional set of policies such as for mixed-income housing or jobs creation has long been held as an intrusion on local self-governance. Yet the interconnectedness wrought by urbanization means that most problems faced by communities in a globalized and urbanized world require broad based participation from people and governments, at scales varying from the local to the global, to be tackled effectively. Insights gained from literature, case studies and
interviews suggests that regionalism relies on persuasion, inspiration, and the creation of context specific governance structures. All of which necessitate social innovation. The weaknesses and gaps identified by this thesis with regard to public participation demonstrate that just as the regionalist approach of tackling of large-scale issues associated with urbanization challenges established systems of planning and governance, it challenges established expectations from the practice of public participation as well. Regional planning requires visionary approaches that are tough to come by within the fiscal and time constraints of tightly prescribed regulatory planning processes. If we are seeking solutions to urban problems at scale, then we should expect to solve them out of the bounds of existing planning and governance structures created for distributive ends.

Section 2.3 articulated the following capacities for public participation in regional governance.

- **Involve large numbers of people spread over multiple administrative boundaries** – this idea turned out to be the rudimentary form of the three-element model of public participation presented in chapter 3. This model emphasizing the interlinkages between governance structure, planning process and public coupled with the three elements of public participation formed the basis for the analytical framework for regional public participation. Figure 7.1 reproduces the conceptual model and the elements of public participation.
Figure 7.1 Conceptual Model and Elements of Public Participation

- **Allow for a spectrum of participatory functions and impact** – NYMTC’s was the conservative approach of “considering public comments”, whereas NJTPA had a slightly nuanced approach that attempted “considering of public comments” along with “public education and fostering of regional outlook”. This shows that even within the procedural decision making approach to public participation, there is some room for maneuvering a range of impacts. Procedural approaches to enhancing public participation have the greatest impact in this spectrum.

- **Allow for a spectrum of planning outcomes ranging from the visionary to the regulatory** – this is where structural approaches to evaluating public participation demonstrate the greatest impact. Just as the collaborative practice framework (Innes and Booher 2004) is significant as a structural counterpart to public participation in critical planning contexts, so is social innovation as a structural counterpart to public participation in visionary planning processes.
Due to the structural interlinkages described in the model of public participation, public participatory exercises are subject to the pressures of the planning process. At present, the accent on regulatory resource allocation in metropolitan transportation planning leaves little room for visionary problem solving. A regional planning agency charged with regulatory planning tasks and allocation of funds for transportation improvement programs is the right mechanism to implement solutions but not necessarily the right one for coming up with solutions.

Table 7.0 Structural Counterparts to Public Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning Context</th>
<th>Critical Planning</th>
<th>Regulatory Planning</th>
<th>Visionary Planning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plan Function</td>
<td>Resource Allocation and Problem Solving</td>
<td>Resource Allocation</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objective of Public Participation</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Public Participation</td>
<td>Social Innovation</td>
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7.2 State of the Research on Public Participation in Regional Planning

The thesis was driven by the belief that a synergistic relationship between the public and the planning process can facilitate the expression of the regional experience in regional planning and governance. Research conducted for this thesis proves that such synergy is aspirational and shall remain so unless elemental, structural changes ensure regional planning is truly so in scale and not merely in scope, as it currently is. This explains why, as noted in section 1.1, researchers continue to pursue fundamental questions of how and can public participation work at the regional scale.
This thesis presented an overarching research question, “how does scale affect the function and structure of public participation in planning processes? Some headway has been made in determining the function of public participation in regional contexts. The notion of developing social innovation as a structural counterpart to public participation is a partial answer to the overarching research question. The answers to the sub questions follow.

- What are the problems associated with replicating community-scale participatory processes at the metropolitan regional scale? The notion of single handedly facilitating public participation without the assistance of governance partners is a throwback to small-scale participatory processes. Given the geographic extent and large population size of regions that is extremely limiting as it does not help the public perceive the region or develop a broad-based view that extends beyond local concerns.

- What are the potential advantages of restructuring public participation for the regional scale? Regional governance grows in significance, yet public awareness of regional planning continues to remain lower than desirable. Effective regional participatory structures can offset this and help build robust public support for regional planning.

- What would be the foundational principles of public participatory structures that meet the unique needs of metropolitan regional planning? Foundational principles are likely to keep evolving with changing needs of regional planning. This thesis has found a compelling need to adjust expectations from public participation to suit the lack of robust regional governance structures. The proposal to include social innovation as a function of participation in regional contexts is a foundational principle.
• What does it take to engage the public regionally or what does it take to develop a regional outlook in the public? The case study has demonstrated messaging of content is key but in the absence of participatory activities that tackle the region as a unified whole, the question is only partially answered.

7.3 Utility of structural and procedural approaches for evaluating public participation

A structural approach is beneficial to unravel deep-seated barriers to implementing effective public participatory exercises, which may not surface otherwise. As NYMTC’s case demonstrated, lack of knowledge of best practices in public participation is not always the problem; power asymmetries within NYMTC’s council hampers its autonomy creating barriers to improving public participation. While the structural approach is suitable for revealing longstanding and deep-seated issues, the procedural approach helps improve efficiency and performance in structurally sound contexts.

7.4 Structural capacity indicators for public participation in regional governance

This thesis identified a lack of metrics for evaluating structural support for public participation in regional planning contexts. Indicators of regional governance capacity from the public participatory perspective will serve to raise awareness and improve the quality of public participation. Nelles (2012) puts forth three indicators of regional governance capacity:

1. Partnerships tend to be more highly institutionalized ensuring accountability and transparency – indicated by free and open access of governance data
2. Participation of local authorities is high – indicated when local authorities are active office bearers and perform vital instead of ceremonial functions

3. Participants do not undermine the partnership by duplicating functions performed by the initiative – as indicated by NJTPA’s choice to voluntarily align with Together NJ and optimize resources

I have added the following three from a regional public participation standpoint:

4. Diverse governance partners are sought and recognized as an asset – capacity building measures are offered to ensure all partners contribute meaningfully

5. Clearly stated regional goals sensitive to social and environmental justice – indicated by adherence to said goals

6. Engaged leadership - fosters partnerships and relationships where none existed before; prioritizes organizational transparency and accountability

7.5 Best practices for public participation in regional settings identified in the thesis

As demonstrated by NJTPA and TNJ’s leadership, leaders who subscribe to and advocate for new regionalist values such as equity, access, competitiveness, and community show a greater commitment and interest in meaningfully connecting with the public. Engaged leaders are highly skilled at relaying relatable messages to the public. The following takeaways from their messaging style are worth documenting as best practices. First, ‘engaged’ leaders demonstrate how individual lifestyle choices cumulatively affect a region’s present and future. Doing so, they effectively empower individuals to visualize their lives in scales beyond the local and
foster participation in regional initiatives. Presenting complex, large-scale issues in personally relatable terms is key for strong public engagement. Second, they strive to know their public and are willing to meet the public ‘where they are’. NJTPA leaders acknowledge that the millennial population - the leaders of the future - are unlikely to engage with government agencies in traditional modes and show a keenness to adopt emerging, technology-centric modes of public engagement. Third, engaged leaders strive recognize the need for collectively convening the public on a regional platform.

7.6 Relevance of the thesis
Finally, twists and turns in legislative history show that the cause of public participation is advanced by periodically revising relevant legislation. Starting from the late 1960s, federal transportation legislation has paid attention to making “citizen participation” an integral part of the regional transportation planning process. Yet, as previous legislative changes, such as the expansion of public participatory provisions in the 1990s indicate, the cause of public participation is advanced by revising the relevant legislative provisions. Such revisions require periodic examination of the sort attempted in this thesis.

7.7 Directions for further research
1. This thesis identifies lack of intergovernmental cooperation as a strong obstacle to regional governance. A study of regional cooperation in Northwestern Europe, Germany or international cooperation in the European Union can lend pointers for devising structures that establish a common ground across administrative and political barriers.
2. The socio-political and cultural context is significant in determining planning outcomes. This applies for public participation in regional settings as well. A nationwide study of public participation in metropolitan transportation planning will serve as a first step to develop a body of knowledge on the topic at that scale.

3. A complementary, comparative study of public participation in other regional governance structures, such as those for economic development, may advance understanding of public participation across sectors. Cross-sectoral understanding of planning practices can prove vital for developing integrative practice frameworks from a sustainability perspective.

4. A study of literature on social innovation to formulate and pilot a social innovation framework and agenda applicable to the Tristate region will serve as a first step towards actualizing a seemingly idealistic objective of public participation.
Appendix A: Interview Guide

A loosely structured, conversational interview style was adopted to encourage and elicit responses that revealed the overarching ideas framing the interviewee's impressions on public participation and regionalism. The following questions served as a guide.

− What are your impressions on regionalism – in general, in the United States, in the Tristate region?
− What are your impressions about public participation in general, in regional planning, in metropolitan transportation planning?
− How does public participation in regional planning processes differ from participation in local planning processes?
− What are your misgivings about current practices of public participation in regional planning? How can they be improved? How can policy makers and decision makers be motivated to advocate for such improvements?
− Where is regionalism, in the region and the rest of the country, or elsewhere, headed? What role can the public play in advancing regionalism in the Tristate region?
Appendix B: Interview Details

1. Gerry Bogacz, Planning Director, New York Metropolitan Transportation Council. Interview conducted on October 21, 2016


3. James Osborne, Mobility Management Coordinator, Regional and Strategic Planning, NYC Department of Transportation. Interview conducted on October 26, 2016

4. Mary K. Murphy, Executive Director, North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority. Interview conducted on November 2, 2016.

5. Matthew Holt, Executive Committee Member, North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority. Interview conducted on November 2, 2016.


7. Tom Schulze, former Executive Director, New York Metropolitan Transportation Council. Interview conducted on November 1, 2016.

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