



The Status of the Polycentric City Concept in the United States, Canada and Other Selected Locations (1978)

This material is taken from *Transit and the Polycentric City*, By Jerry B. Schneider, pages 50-55, Departments of Civil Engineering and Urban Planning, University of Washington, Seattle, 1981.

A. Results of the U. S. Survey of Large Metropolitan Planning Organizations.

In order to ascertain the present status of the polycentric city concept, a survey of regional planning agencies in urban regions having a population of 500,000 or more was undertaken in April, 1978. The survey was also distributed to selected regional planning agencies in less populous regions in order to sample the use of the concept among smaller regions. Some information on this topic has also been obtained from Canada and abroad. Results from the survey and other sources are discussed in this section.

The questionnaire was quite short and simple and was designed primarily to identify those metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) which are most interested in the polycentric city concept. A similar questionnaire was distributed to 46 MPOs in early 1977. Since several MPOs were in the process of updating or preparing new land use plans, the survey was repeated in 1978.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requirements state that agencies wishing to receive federal funds for comprehensive planning after August 22, 1977, must have completed a satisfactory land use plan [2]. HUD's requirements regarding the land use element of the regional plan are relatively straightforward. They call for a land use element that includes "studies, criteria and implementing procedures necessary for effectively guiding and controlling major decisions as to where growth shall and shall not take place."

Furthermore, HUD has placed a major emphasis on the specification of timing of growth as a necessary part of an acceptable land use plan. Clearly, any attempt to meet these requirements must include some resolution of the polycentric city issue. The survey was designed to provide a rough measure of the status of the polycentric city issue. The results from 46 of the 48 MPOs that serve populations greater than 500,000 are discussed below. Table 3.1 is a tabulation of the responses obtained from all 46 MPO's, and individual responses are presented in the chart on

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page 4. First, it can be seen in Table 3.1 that most of the MPOs have, or are in the process of preparing, land use plans. Thirty-six of the responding 46 MPO's stated that they presently have a land use plan which has been adopted. Of the remaining ten MPO's, seven stated that they are in the process of preparing a land use plan and expect adoption in 1978 or 1979. Three MPO's (Boston, Massachusetts; Houston, Texas; and Norfolk, Virginia) stated that they are not preparing a land use plan.

The next four questions dealt specifically with the polycentric city concept. First, we asked if a map showing the location of areas proposed to develop into major diversified centers either was, or was expected to be, included in the land use plan. Of the 43 MPO's having or preparing land use plans, 56% responded yes, and 44% responded no. These results indicate that about half the MPOs have taken the first step toward establishing the polycentric city concept in their areas. Next, we asked those MPO's that have a map indicating the location of desired major diversified centers if the plan describes the desired size or composition of each center at some future time. These results indicate that 17 MPO's have taken, or expect to take, the second step of including some projections or targets in the plan as to the size and location issue. A total of 13 MPO's have addressed the issues of both size and mix of activities at each designated location for a center. Of the 24 MPO's that have mapped the centers elements of their plans, about three-fourths have addressed the issue of mix.

A fourth question asked those MPO's that have, or expect to include, a major diversified centers element in their land use plans if they would also include a strategy or action plan for implementing the MDC concept. Seventy-five per cent of these MPO's responded yes; 25% responded no.

The fifth question asked those MPO's with action plans if any local agencies in the region had done, or intended to do, any type of development plan for any of the major diversified center locations. Sixty-seven per cent responded that local agencies had done this work, 17% responded that local agencies intended to do detailed plans, 11% responded that no local agencies had done the plans, and 5% did not respond.

Finally, those agencies whose land use plans do not contain a major diversified centers element were asked to give the major reasons responsible for this position. Responses to this question were quite varied. Several agencies stated that there was too little growth in their jurisdictions to warrant such a policy. Others pointed to the political difficulty of selecting growth areas, noting that their land use plans are general and not site-specific. Many MPOs responded that their policies on future growth are no more specific than stating that growth should take place within the urban services area. The identification of this trend should be a matter of great importance to the Urban Mass Transportation Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Canadian cities were not included in this survey, but two have been visited during the course of this study: Vancouver in British Columbia and Toronto, Ontario. Both are far more advanced in their thinking and action in this field than any large American region we know about at this time. Vancouver is probably one to two years ahead of Toronto in terms of the extent and depth of its action program, which is designed to implement the Regional Town Centres element of its Livable Region Plan, adopted in 1975 by the Greater Vancouver Regional District. These survey results were used to plan the field work for this study, which involved visits to twelve U.S., two Canadian, and one British city. This field work was supplemented by a review of documents from several

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other cities as well as from some foreign countries. Together, these results provide a cross-sectional view of the state-of-the-art in the field of major activity center planning and should be helpful in formulating some realistic land-use policy guidelines for the Urban Mass Transportation Administration.

Table 3.1
Overall Results of a 1978 Survey of
46 Metropolitan Planning Agencies in the United States

1. Does your agency presently have a land use plan which has been adopted?

Yes	78%	(36 responses)
In process	15%	(7)
No	7%	(3)
	100%	46

2. If answer to 1 is 'yes' or 'in process', does (or will) this plan include a map which indicates the locations of areas which are encouraged to develop into "major diversified centers" (MDC's)?

Yes	56%	(24)
No	44%	(19)
	100%	43

3. If answer to 2 is 'yes', does the plan indicate the desired size or composition (mix of activities) at each location at some future time?

Both size and mix	54%	(13)
Size but not mix	17%	(4)
Mix but not size	0%	(0)
Neither size nor mix	29%	(7)
	100%	24

4. If answer to 2 is 'yes', does the plan include a strategy or action plan for implementing the MDC concept?

Yes	75%	(18)
No	25%	(6)
	100%	24

5. If answer to 4 is 'yes', have any local agencies in your region proposed some type of development plan for any of these MDC locations? If not, do any intend to prepare such plans?

Have prepared	67%	(12)
Have not prepared	11%	(2)
Intend to prepare	17%	(3)
No response	5%	(1)

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	LAND USE PLAN	YEAR(S) OF ADOPTION	MAP OF MDC'S INCLUDED	SIZE INCLUDED	MTX INCLUDED	ACTION PLAN	LOCAL AGENCY PLANS PREPARED	LOCAL AGENCY PLANS INTENDED
NEW YORK	YES	'77	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	-
CHICAGO	IN PROCESS		NO	-	-	-	-	-
LOS ANGELES	YES	'76	NO	-	-	-	-	-
PHILADELPHIA	YES	'69, '78	YES	NO	NO	NO	-	-
DETROIT	YES	'77	NO	-	-	-	-	-
BOSTON	NO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SAN FRANCISCO	YES	'77	NO	-	-	-	-	-
WASHINGTON, D.C.	YES	'77	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	-
DALLAS	YES	'73	NO	-	-	-	-	-
ST. LOUIS	YES	'77	NO	-	-	-	-	-
PITTSBURGH	IN PROCESS		YES	YES	YES	NO	-	-
HOUSTON	NO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
BALTIMORE	YES	'78	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	-
MINNEAPOLIS	YES	'75	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
CLEVELAND	YES	'78	NO	-	-	-	-	-
ATLANTA	YES	'75	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	-
SAN DIEGO	YES	'77	YES	YES	YES	YES	-	YES
MIAMI	YES	'78	NO	-	-	-	-	-
MILWAUKEE	YES	'66, '78	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	-
SEATTLE	YES	'77	YES	YES	YES	NO	-	-
DENVER	YES	'73, '78	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	-
CINCINNATI	YES	'78	NO	-	-	-	-	-
TAMPA	YES	'77	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	-
BUFFALO	YES	'70	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	-
KANSAS CITY	YES	'77	NO	-	-	-	-	-
PHOENIX	YES	'78	YES	NO	NO	NO	-	-
INDIANAPOLIS	IN PROCESS		YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
NEW ORLEANS	YES	'73, '77	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	-
PORTLAND	YES	'76, '77	NO	-	-	-	-	-
COLUMBUS	YES	'72	NO	-	-	-	-	-
HARTFORD	YES	'78	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
SAN ANTONIO	YES	'77	NO	-	-	-	-	-
SACRAMENTO	IN PROCESS		NO	-	-	-	-	-
MEMPHIS	YES	'78	YES	NO	NO	YES	-	-
DAYTON	YES	'73	NO	-	-	-	-	-
ALBANY	IN PROCESS		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	-
TOLEDO	YES	-	NO	-	-	-	-	-
OKLAHOMA CITY	YES	'76	YES	NO	NO	NO	-	-
NORFOLK	NO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SALT LAKE CITY	IN PROCESS		NO	-	-	-	-	-
NASHVILLE	YES	'77	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
JACKSONVILLE	YES	'78	NO	-	-	-	-	-
SYRACUSE	YES	'77	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	-
OMAHA	IN PROCESS		NO	-	-	-	-	-
RICHMOND	YES	'75	YES	YES	YES	NO	-	-
YOUNGSTOWN	YES	'74	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	-

Responses from individual planning organizations to 1978 Polycentric City Concept Survey.

Rodney E. Engelen
<http://www.mixedusecores.com/>
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