

Metro Grows Up

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August 29, 2008

In 1992, the voters of the region took an important step when they overwhelmingly adopted a home rule charter for Metro, our regional government. Metro, created in 1979 by a vote of the people, is still the only directly elected regional government in the United States.

However, prior to 1992, Metro was a creature of the state of Oregon. Its powers and duties were spelled out in State law, and managed by the State Legislature, not by the voters who elected its Council. By creating and adopting a home rule charter, the voters of the Metro district became the managers of Metro's destiny, an important step in the evolution and maturation of our regional government.

Despite the creation of a home rule charter, Metro continued to look like the place to which all functions that no other unit of government wanted or could manage were sent. Metro's organizational chart read like a kit of parts: the Zoo, garbage disposal (or solid waste management as we call it today), regional transportation planning, managing the region's Urban Growth Boundary, and more. Each task had its own place at the table, and little was done to describe the purposes for Metro in the structure of the institution.

Though Metro does worldclass work and has been recognized for its achievements, its organization according to subjects rather than functions resulted in duplication and a lack of coordination. In addition, though the Metro Charter spoke to the purposes of Metro, you had to have either a tour guide or a sixth sense to understand how the internal organization of our regional government directly served those goals.

The Sustainable Metro Project is the first effort in the history of the organization to align its organization with its overarching purposes. Rather than each department having its own planning, outreach, and management components, these functions are now being organized across the agency and shared.

Why is this so important? Why should citizens care about a revision of the organizational chart? By taking these steps Metro is making better use of scarce resources. This will eliminate the duplication that frankly no organization can or should have to maintain. Second, this will make how Metro is organized match the role it has been given in its Charter. The voters will be able to hold Metro accountable for those Charter ambitions, and it's about time.

Finally, as bureaucratic as this sounds, it signals a real maturation of Metro. Instead of a kit of parts, Metro will now be organized along functional lines. Instead of serving old divisions of responsibility, Metro will be organized to serve the values and goals that we, the voters of the region, expect Metro to steward and champion. The Sustainable Metro Project is more than a shuffling of deck chairs. It's a promise that our desire to create the most livable metropolitan region in North America will be effectively and thoughtfully supported in the years to come. Good work!