



Metropolitan Affairs Coalition

Overview

The Metropolitan Affairs Coalition (MAC) in the Detroit region is known for its emphasis on research, polling and focus groups. It brings together leaders from business, labor and government to address public policy issues. The Coalition is closely linked to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. Paul Tait is the Chief Executive of both groups.

MAC's 50-member Board includes "second-tier" business leaders such as corporate affairs vice presidents, leaders of accounting, legal and other professional services industries, and some of the major auto suppliers. By contrast, Detroit Renaissance's Board includes the region's top-tier CEOs. The Coalition also has representatives from government, nonprofit and labor.

The Metropolitan Affairs Coalition's regional priorities include regional cooperation, public transportation, a regional river initiative and a regional alliance for firefighter training.

Regional Priorities

The Coalition's primary effort to build regional cooperation has been the "Building One Community" initiative. In 2003, the Metropolitan Affairs Coalition commissioned a survey of residents' attitudes toward regional cooperation. The survey found strong support for regional collaboration, but it also found that most respondents believe attempts at cooperation would fail because communities are afraid to lose control. MAC next plans a project to highlight the benefits of regional cooperation.

The Coalition began to promote regional cooperation after working with Detroit Renaissance in favor of a tax to raise money for the region's cultural institutions. The groups were unable to galvanize enough regional coordination for the measure, and it failed.

MAC has taken a lead role studying the feasibility of a rapid bus transit system known as "SpeedLink" for the region (see box on next page). MAC staffers developed public, private and labor support for the project but ran into opposition because of the region's traditional reliance on the auto industry. MAC has taken

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Type of Organization

Primarily business-led

Unit of Membership

Individual

Number of Members

2003: 44

1998: 54

Membership by Company Size

Small Companies: 30%

Mid-sized Companies: 10%

Large Companies: 60%

Dues Determined by

Dues are not assessed; Revenue is derived from private-sector contributions, investments and occasionally foundation grants

Annual Operating Budget

2003: Less than \$500,000

1998: Less than \$500,000

Staff Members (FTE)

2003: 4

1998: 4

Board Members

2003: 50

Regional Priorities

Regional Cooperation, Public Transportation, Regional River Initiative, Regional Alliance for Firefighter Training

the lead in obtaining funding for design work for “Speed Link — A Train on Wheels,” but so far the SpeedLink proposal is still encountering opposition.

The Metropolitan Affairs Coalition has also taken a major role in the Greater Detroit American Heritage River Initiative. The Detroit River was designated in 1998 as one of 14 American Heritage Rivers in the U.S. MAC has managed the initiative, which is creating greenways, developing waterfront properties and preserving natural habitats along a 32-mile riverfront.

The final regional priority of the Metropolitan Affairs Coalition is evidenced by a project that helped several fire departments and community colleges to collaborate on a training program for firefighters. The effort led to the creation of the Regional Alliance for Firefighter Training.

MAC PROMOTES “SPEEDLINK”

The Metropolitan Affairs Coalition has been promoting the “SpeedLink” transit system to improve transportation in the Detroit region. SpeedLink would include rapid-transit buses with dedicated lanes on a 12-line network. It would also include “InterLink,” traditional buses for longer journeys that don’t require high-speed service, and “HomeLink,” a neighborhood-based service using small vehicles to take people to stores, hospitals, schools and bus stations. So far, this region raised on the auto industry has yet to embrace “SpeedLink,” and it remains on the drawing board.

Structure and Operations

The Metropolitan Affairs Coalition is linked closely to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), the regional planner in southeast Michigan. In the 1980s, MAC’s predecessor, the MetroFoundation, moved its operational structure under SEMCOG to maximize efficiency. The close link has remained over the years. Today, MAC adopts SEMCOG projects and advocates for them. Paul Tait is the Chief Executive of both organizations.

MAC’s Board represents 44 companies. Slightly more than half of them are large companies. The Board includes corporate affairs vice presidents, leaders of accounting, legal and other professional services industries, and some of the major auto suppliers. Funding comes not from annual dues but from private-sector contributions, investments and grants.

The Metropolitan Affairs Coalition’s membership has fallen slightly over last five years, from 54 in 1998 to 44 in 2003. Two changes in the business-civic landscape may be to blame: business mergers that have removed some of the region’s top executives and eliminated some paying members, and increased global competition that has forced some executives to focus exclusively on their core businesses.

Paul Tait said another factor may be that today's smaller entrepreneurial firms are focused on the bottom line and have less interest in larger regional issues. Tait said MAC will have to become more creative in finding support for its projects. For example, it was able to use some of a federal settlement from a water pollution lawsuit to help fund its Heritage River Initiative.