

Governing Structures for Successful Regional Transit Coordination and their Formation

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Introduction

This research can help inform future decisions on how to structure a Regional Transit Coordinator (RTC) and more effectively manage the planning and provision of transit services, particularly in multi-county and/or multi-operator metropolitan areas. An RTC is the entity that ensures coordination among multiple operators (or modes) in three principal areas:

- Unified fare policy: single fare/ticket policy regardless of owner/operator or mode
- Single marketing, branding, and customer interface
- Short- and long-range planning

Specific research questions investigated include: Were existing case study RTCs created by law or a voluntary consortium, and what types of authority were they granted? If there is a governing board, how is it structured? How is the executive director selected, and to what extent is the executive director shielded from political influence?

Study Methods

The methodology involved first identifying 40 organizations on four continents that were known or thought to have the role of regional transit coordination. After an initial analysis of these organizations, the study identified 16 organizations as the case studies, most of which had already played a prominent role in the coordination of transit services in the three principal areas.

Ten case studies were fully functioning RTCs, while five were somewhere along the integration continuum. The last case study, a regional alliance (in the greater Seattle area) was only initiating limited coordination. For eight case studies, the RTC serves as the coordinator of the transit alliance members but

does not operate services, while for three case studies, the regional rail provider also coordinates the other transit agencies in the region. For five case studies, the RTC was the sole (or consolidated) transit provider in the region—i.e., integrating its own modes.

In each case, relevant agency information and regional data were acquired through a scan of the available agency reports and literature and both agency and regional planning websites. For clarification, agency and regional planning staff were interviewed. In addition to basic facts about each RTC, (e.g., year formed, description, and number of transit agencies coordinated), the study examined three key governance issues: board composition, including how the board members were selected; their position (if ex-officio members); and the level of professional knowledge of transit issues (for ex officio and appointed citizens). In addition, the study determined whether the RTC was established by law or voluntarily and described the management structure.

Findings

A synthesis of the study findings led to the following conclusions concerning the formation of the organization and its governing structures:

- The following three types of RTC have been successful: Type 1 (coordination only), Type 2 (coordination of all agencies by a regional transit provider), and Type 3 (sole transit provider/consolidation).
- Successful RTC agencies include agencies of the state, government-owned corporations, independent authorities, and voluntary consortia.
- There are many factors involved in creating an RTC, including the manner in which it is established (by law or as a voluntary consortium), and if by law,

whether it should be an independent authority (special district) or come under a government agency (e.g., department, government-owned corporation).

- Other elements central to the creation of an RTC include metropolitan area dynamics (size and number of cities and counties) and the size and relative involvement of the region (e.g., New Jersey, Ontario, Barcelona, Zurich, and Manchester).
- A major issue to resolve is whether or not to have a board of directors and, if so, its composition and its empowerment of the board and the executive director.
- There are two types of board members: ex officio and appointed citizens, with the latter largely confined to the U.S. and Canada. Among U.S. agencies, New Jersey Transit (NJT) has the most transit-knowledgeable board.
- Voluntary transit federations can be placed in two categories: a loose federation operating by consensus or a strong federation with legally binding arrangements.

Successful RTCs range from state entities to independent authorities to voluntary alliances.

Policy/Practice Recommendations

The study offers recommendations for establishing California RTCs, including the following:

- In multi-county metropolitan areas, consider creating a multi-county-owned corporation with an ex officio board.
- A good model for an ex officio board in the San Francisco Bay Area would draw members from some or all of the following entities:
 - Counties (and cities) that operate transit
 - Mayors (or designees) of the major cities (e.g., San Francisco and San José)
 - High-level staff from the large regional transit agencies
 - High-level staff from the large bus agencies
 - State transportation commissioner
 - Ex officio or appointed citizens with professional transit expertise

- California should consider developing a supportive legislative framework to facilitate the creation/evolution of RTCs rather than mandate one solution. Such a framework would encourage the formation of RTCs in all metropolitan areas of the state and allow each to have its own unique structure.

About the Authors

Charles Rivasplata, Richard Lee, Michelle DeRobertis, and Christopher Ferrell are principals of Transportation Choices for Sustainable Communities. In addition, Drs. Rivasplata and Lee are faculty in the Urban and Regional Planning Department at San Jose State University. Each of the four authors has researched transportation planning topics for more than 25 years.

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2229



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