METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT
STRATEGIC PLAN ASSEMBLY

ASSEMBLY STATEMENT

Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
October 29 and 30, 1993

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At the close of their discussion, the participants of this Assembly reviewed and adopted as a group the following statement. The statement represents general agreement. However, no one was asked to sign it. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to every recommendation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Southern California's water community is at a critical time in its history as a steward of water resources. Increased environmental regulations and the attendant competition for water have resulted in reduced supplies of imported water. At the same time, the costs of supplying imported water have risen, in part because environmental impacts need to be mitigated, but also because of population growth, which forces the region to turn to more expensive sources as the easily accessed water is exhausted.

The agency that has traditionally had the lead role for meeting the region's imported water needs is The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (Metropolitan), a special district created in 1928 under State enabling legislation. Metropolitan, through its staff, carries out many duties in connection with securing, storing, distributing, treating, and financing water under Board policy for the region. It is a confederation of 27 Member Agencies which purchase wholesale water from Metropolitan, handle sub-regional distribution, and resell the water to other suppliers or directly to consumers. The decisions of Metropolitan are made by a 51 member Board of Directors appointed by their Member Agencies, and the Directors are accountable to their appointing authorities, most of whom are elected officials.

The pressures on Southern California's water supplies are causing Metropolitan, its Member Agencies, and others in the region's water community to reassess regional water policies, financing structures, and governance. Many issues have been addressed through Metropolitan's strategic planning process, but Metropolitan has also wanted to consider questions outside this process and to include a higher level of participation.

Therefore, on October 29 and 30, 1993, Metropolitan convened a "Strategic Plan Assembly" at the Doubletree Hotel in San Pedro (an overview of the Assembly is provided in Appendix 1). Eighty-four people attended, excluding Assembly staff and observers. Participants included Directors on Metropolitan's Board, Member Agency Managers, and Metropolitan senior staff (a list of Assembly participants is provided in Appendix 2). This paper presents the conclusions reached.

II. CHALLENGES ARISING FROM METROPOLITAN'S CHANGING MISSION

During the past two decades, Metropolitan has broadened its role not just to function as a supplier of imported water, but also to play a part in region-wide water management. Metropolitan has used financial incentives and other means to encourage its Member Agencies to develop alternative water supplies and to become less dependent on Metropolitan for water supplies. On their own and in response to Metropolitan's incentives, Member Agencies have developed additional groundwater resources, promoted conservation, developed water reclamation projects, and supported Metropolitan at the State and federal level to improve imported supplies.

These changes have been good for the region, but Metropolitan's changing role has also created a certain amount of political and administrative tension between and among Metropolitan and the Member Agencies.

A. One set of problems faced by Metropolitan and its Member Agencies includes perceptions of inequities in financing Metropolitan's services. Some of the real or perceived inequities are:

1. Member Agencies differ in the extent to which they are dependent on Metropolitan for imported water. Metropolitan water projects, financed with revenues from water sales, are paid for, to a greater extent, by Member Agencies more dependent on imported water, even though all Member Agencies are able to utilize the system. This is perceived as unfair by at least some Member Agencies.

2. Some Member Agencies believe that the Member Agencies experiencing growth are not paying their fair share.

3. The location of storage facilities has differential benefits across Member Agencies even though costs may be borne

equally. Those who are near the facilities are thought by some to benefit more than those who are farther away.

4. There is a perception that the seasonal storage water rates disproportionately benefit those agencies that can utilize the seasonal storage program.

5. There is a perception that local resource investments by Metropolitan do not necessarily produce regional benefits commensurate with the expenditures, because Metropolitan lacks control over managing the regional benefit.

6. There is a perception that the Member Agencies that pay greater taxes, but take less water, suffer some inequity.

B. Another set of issues arises from the internal political structure of Metropolitan.

1. Member Agencies are responsible to their local constituencies, and yet Metropolitan itself is increasingly involved in regional and Statewide water management activities, in addition to importing and distributing water. This can create a problem for Directors because local interests do not consistently coincide with regional and State needs. A certain amount of tension is probably healthy and is naturally associated with representative political institutions, but the tension among local, regional, and State interests at Metropolitan is being exacerbated by Metropolitan's rapidly changing role, recent droughts, and current economic problems in the State.

2. Voting by Metropolitan's Board of Directors is weighted according to the assessed valuation of the property within Member Agency jurisdictions. Member Agencies with lower assessed valuations tend to feel that the priorities of the Member Agencies with higher assessed valuations dominate Metropolitan's agenda.

3. There are also concerns that the "subagencies" served by the Member Agencies are not given an adequate voice in decision-making. The subagencies are in direct contact with consumers and hence represent thousands of voices while some Member Agencies represent only a few voices (the subagencies), and yet only the Member Agencies participate directly with Metropolitan.

C. A third set of issues comes from barriers to implementing regional policies which are perceived to be needed.

> 1. It might be expected that the region's groundwater supplies should be managed for the benefit of the region as a whole, but groundwater supplies are controlled, not by Metropolitan, nor necessarily by Metropolitan's Member Agencies. Local control may be an obstacle that impedes full utilization of the resource.
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> 2. The level of regional subsidization of local resource development is perceived to be an issue. On the one hand, promoting groundwater development, conservation, desalination, and wastewater reuse is essential regional policy because it reduces the region's dependence on imported supplies, and yet on the other hand Member Agencies do not all benefit directly from these programs.
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> 3. Some believe that using Metropolitan's rate structure to promote regionally beneficial actions by Member Agencies is sometimes ineffective and can cause unintended consequences. For example, to promote local water storage, Metropolitan reduces the cost of water when supplies are available. This may increase the cost of water for Member Agencies who do not have storage facilities, and hence the latter are inclined to see it as unfair. Others argue that efforts to increase the amount of stored water in Southern California basins can provide substantial regional benefits that balance the costs to the Member Agencies as a whole.

D. Another set of problems arises at the administrative level. Member Agencies are seen by Metropolitan as sometimes using Metropolitan as a scapegoat with consumers when Member Agencies raise rates. Conversely, Member Agencies think that Metropolitan has at times been too insular and stand-offish. Both sides recognize that such perceptions are common in complex organizations, and most observers agree that communication and problem-solving have improved. But everyone would like better communication and collaborative decision-making.

E. These problems and inequities, whether real or merely perceived, make it difficult for Member Agencies and Metropolitan to work together effectively. Later in this Assembly Statement, recommendations are made for resolving some of these issues.

III. AFFORDABILITY AND FINANCING STRATEGIES

The challenge facing Metropolitan and the Member Agencies is not only to provide adequate water supplies for Southern California in an economically and environmentally responsible way, but also to be perceived as doing so by the public. Studies have shown that water rates in Southern California are in line with other urban areas in the United States and are not high by historic standards. Further, in the 1980s, Metropolitan went over 7 years without a rate increase. However, the public has recently become more concerned about both reliability because of shortages, and costs because rates had to be raised substantially during the past 3 years when Southern California infrastructure costs increased.

It is within this context that Metropolitan has been reviewing its rate structure. The challenge is to develop a financing system that is efficient, provides clear accountability, is accepted as equitable by Member Agencies, and fosters regionally beneficial water use practices.

A. Assuring reliability of a quality water supply is more important than guaranteeing that the cheapest water is being bought. Metropolitan should stress reliability while minimizing costs in the acquisition of water both long-term and short-term.

B. The rate structure and financing framework should reflect the benefits derived by Member Agencies. Establishing a relationship between costs and benefits helps Metropolitan, its Directors, and Member Agencies to decide whether to proceed with various programs. It also helps establish equity and the perception of equity because those who benefit can be shown to be those who pay. This approach should consider a readiness-to-serve charge that captures the benefit of Metropolitan's investment in facilities.

C. Both a peaking charge and a capacity acquisition charge should be instituted, but they must be designed carefully.

1. The peaking charge should be used only as an economic incentive to shift use. There must be a clear link between the cost of peaking and the charge for peaking. The charge should be applied only to short time periods.

2. New demand caused by growth and development should be charged its fair share for impacts to the system. Capacity acquisition charges are preferable to impact or new connection fees. However, Metropolitan must be extremely judicious in determining what "fair share" is; the connection between the impact and the charge and consideration of other sources of revenue from growth, must be carefully documented.

D. There are differences of opinion about two other financing approaches.

1. One question is whether Metropolitan should provide discounted rates for certain classes of users, such as agriculture or industry. The most widely shared view is that this should be the role of the local retailers, not Metropolitan. The one exception to this majority opinion is the view among some participants that discount rates might be appropriate in very special circumstances.

2. The other question is whether the State Water Project should be financed through *ad valorem* taxes, or another dedicated funding source. One view is that this should be reconsidered when the citizenry's attitude toward taxes relaxes. To raise the issue in the current environment might be counterproductive. It might be more practical to pursue a dedicated revenue source instead of *ad valorem* taxes. However, another opinion is that Metropolitan should maximize its use of *ad valorem* taxes to support the fixed costs associated with the State Water Project.

E. Even though it might make for good press and local support, Metropolitan should not link its rates to an arbitrary economic indicator, such as the Consumer Price Index. Tying rates to economic indicators would break the more important connection between price and need, and it would reduce the flexibility of the Board of Directors. The important points are for Metropolitan to show sensitivity to economic conditions and to use sound financial planning to stabilize rate increases.

F. Regional funding of local projects is regionally beneficial and must be continued; however, funding certain local projects (such as reclamation) through dedicated sources, while perhaps desirable for purposes of accountability, should not be pursued. To do so would inhibit the Board's flexibility, and it might be difficult to relate the charge to the benefit.

G. Public support is critical for implementing Metropolitan's programs. Winning this support requires a plan and a team effort between Metropolitan and its Member Agencies, with Metropolitan coordinating and financing public awareness programs and the Member Agencies handling more direct and grassroots education. Effective public educational tools include mass media and public informational meetings with local leaders.

IV. SELECTION CRITERIA AND RESOURCE MIX

Metropolitan and its Member Agencies are faced with some tough decisions. They must come up with the best combination of water sources to meet the region's needs economically, equitably, and reliably. This requires choosing among various levels of reliance on imported water, surface water storage, and local water development.

A. As Metropolitan evaluates alternative resource mixes in its Integrated Resources Planning (IRP) process, it will apply a series of selection criteria to its decision making. The IRP workgroup, comprised of Member Agency Managers and Metropolitan Management, has developed a list of potential evaluation criteria, including: short-term reliability, long-term reliability, cost, environmental considerations, risk, flexibility, adaptability, timing, equity, the impact on the local economy, and public acceptability. Through a process of forced comparisons, the Assembly participants prioritized these evaluation criteria and evaluated the likelihood of achieving their desired outcomes under current circumstances.

1. The highest priority for evaluating potential alternative resource mixes is long-term reliability. Next comes the total cost of the resource mix. Risk, expressed in terms of both the feasibility and practicability of the mix, is the third highest priority. Below this level, public acceptability, equity, and flexibility of supplies share the fourth priority. Timing and adaptability are the fifth priority; and impact on the local economy, environmental considerations, and short-term reliability share the sixth priority. These rankings are the result of forced pair-wise comparisons among the criteria. The Assembly participants stressed that the region must commit to develop a resource mix that reasonably balances all the criteria including environmental considerations, public acceptance, and others.

2. Confidence regarding the likelihood of achieving these priorities varies. The highest degree of confidence is associated with Metropolitan's ability to meet its short-term reliability criteria. The lowest level of confidence is given to Metropolitan's ability to achieve public acceptance, equity, and control over total costs. A moderate level of confidence is held for achieving long-term reliability, reaching acceptable levels of risk, and achieving flexibility of supplies.

3. Among Metropolitan Directors, Member Agency Managers, and Metropolitan Management there are some

discernable differences in both the priority and levels of confidence associated with several of the evaluation criteria. For example, Metropolitan Managers are significantly more confident than either the Directors or the Member Agency Managers that Metropolitan will achieve its short-term reliability criteria, satisfy environmental concerns, achieve equity, and realize a high level of public acceptance. For the Member Agency Managers, long-term reliability is a lower priority than it is for either Metropolitan Management or the Directors, while public acceptance is a higher priority than it is for the Directors and Metropolitan Staff. These differences among the three groups suggest that a higher level of communication and interaction among Directors, Member Agency Managers, and Metropolitan Management is needed to form a shared vision.

B. The Assembly participants agree that Metropolitan must continue its commitment to the State Water Project (SWP). Despite the difficulties of resolving the complex issues in the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta (Delta), Southern California cannot afford to walk away from its substantial investment, even if the water entitlements which Metropolitan has been paying for years are not realized in the short-term (10-20 years). Because of the SWP's importance to the region, Metropolitan should seek to garner greater political commitment to improving the SWP from other interests. A Statewide alliance should be forged with urban business, labor, community groups, environmental groups, agriculture, and water agencies, and the alliance should seek to demonstrate a willingness to work with federal and State agencies in developing solutions to environmental problems in the Delta. Metropolitan recognizes the water quality problems, difficulties in deliveries for replenishment, and higher costs of reclamation that would result if there are no improvements to the SWP and less water is available.

C. Increased use of local water supplies, such as groundwater, reclaimed water, conservation, and desalinated water, has limitations but must be an integral part of the water resource strategy. Metropolitan should maintain its commitment to developing and maximizing local resources and evaluating the cost effectiveness of these programs in the IRP.

D. A crucial means for providing a reliable water supply to Southern California is a greater reliance on "conjunctive use," where water is imported during wet years, when it is readily available (from, for example, the SWP), and stored for later use during dry years, when it is expensive and scarce. Conjunctive use is a critical element in the solution to the region's water supply problems. The Domenigoni Valley Reservoir Project and the development of additional local groundwater storage are central features in a successful conjunctive use program given the operational constraints of the SWP.

E. In addition to the criteria discussed above, decisions about the resource mix should consider the need to show those outside the region that Southern California is doing everything it can to effectively manage its water resources.

V. GOVERNANCE

Metropolitan faces the difficult task of managing a regional resource with a governance structure that does not contain much regional authority.

A. Metropolitan's leadership role and influence should be strengthened, but its powers should not be enhanced legislatively. Rather, Metropolitan should concentrate on improving regional cooperation and coordination. Although the strategic planning process is strengthening trust between Metropolitan and the Member Agencies, interaction, communication, and the decision making process still need to be improved to accomplish integrated resources planning. Suggestions for improving interaction and communication include:

1. Forming a partnership between the Directors, the Member Agency Managers, and Metropolitan Management to provide proactive leadership and improve trust among the parties;

2. Utilization of mechanisms, such as workshops on key issues.

3. Continuing to improve the dialogue at monthly Member Agency Managers meetings and holding more participatory meetings between Metropolitan and the Member Agencies;

4. Increased resolution of issues at the Board committee level;

5. Greater sharing of financial information between Metropolitan and the Member Agencies to facilitate planning and foster open, business-like relations;

6. Establishing a forum on groundwater issues that includes watermasters, groundwater agencies and Directors that represent areas with groundwater basins; and

7. Utilization of business-like practices in developing programs with Member Agencies.

B. In concept, economic incentives are an effective device for developing and improving local resources, but their use often results in actual or perceived inequities. A clear connection must be established between the incentive and the benefit to the region, and Metropolitan must have the ability to assure that the benefit is delivered.

C. Contracts should also be used to supplement economic incentives, and where appropriate, economic incentives should be tied to performance contracts. The use of contracts could be a means of ensuring agreements between Metropolitan and the Member Agencies and would guarantee returns to both parties.

D. Ensuring accountability of Metropolitan and the Member Agencies to meeting their joint mission will require:

1. A mutual acceptance of, and commitment to, the IRP;

2. Development of complementary strategic plans by all Member Agencies based on the IRP;

3. Rate stability; and

4. Greater community outreach and public participation.

OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN ASSEMBLY

Metropolitan's Strategic Plan Assembly brought together 84 water leaders who were members of Metropolitan's Board of Directors, Member Agencies and Management to review Metropolitan's planning process and begin to develop consensus regarding regional water issues, including the appropriate resource mix, rate program, and governance structure for the stewardship of the regional water resource.

The format for the Strategic Plan Assembly was based on the American Assembly process, which is a procedure designed to reach consensus on controversial and complex issues of interest to diverse parties. The American Assembly started with President Eisenhower at Columbia University in the 1950s.

Central to the success of the Strategic Plan Assembly was the Steering Committee composed of representatives of the three constituency groups participating in the Assembly. The Steering Committee members for the Assembly included the following: Metropolitan Board Members -- Jim Blake, Alf Brandt, Charles Stuart, and Francesca Krauel; Member Agency Managers -- Lester Snow, Don Kendall, Don Harriger, and Rich Atwater; and Metropolitan Management -- Debra Man, Wiley Horne, Ed Means, Tim Quinn, and John Wodraska. The Steering Committee was responsible for planning and coordinating the Assembly. The key issue questions considered by the Assembly participants were developed by the Steering Committee. Metropolitan and Member Agency staff developed background papers that were reviewed and modified by the Steering Committee. The background papers provided Assembly participants with information essential to understanding the key issues and alternative strategies for addressing the key issues.

Over one and a half days, the Assembly, divided into five working groups, considered the key issue questions and developed positions and recommendations. Each working group had a preassigned facilitator and recorder. At the end of the first day, the facilitators and recorders met to construct the draft Assembly Statement which was based on the positions and recommendations of the working groups.

On the second day of the Assembly, the draft Assembly Statement was reviewed by all participants, and the full Assembly, led by the Assembly facilitator, Dr. Lance deHaven-Smith, worked through the document. Revisions and/or changes to specific wording in the document were made by the full Assembly, and agreement was reached at that time on specific language in the Assembly Statement. This process resulted in the development of a final Assembly Statement which will provide guidance for Metropolitan and the Member Agencies as they develop an integrated regional water resource solution, attendant rate structure and Metropolitan's Strategic Plan.

STRATEGIC PLAN ASSEMBLY PARTICIPANTS

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