

A World Class Region Putting Vision into Action

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On December 2, 1987, over 500 people gathered in Raleigh to craft a plan of action addressing eight issues of regional concern. The event that drew them together was the World Class Region Conference, sponsored by the Triangle J Council of Governments.¹

The Conference

The opening remarks were delivered by Avery Upchurch – Mayor of Raleigh and Chairman of the Triangle J Council of Governments and James B. Hunt, Jr. – former Governor of North Carolina and Chairman of the Steering Committee that planned the Conference.

The eight issues addressed at the conference fell under four broad headings, with two areas of concern under each heading. Under Physical Development, the issues were Regional Land Use Priorities and Regional Transit. Economic Development included a World Trade Center and a Regional Telephone System. The Human Resources and Education issues were Education and Dependent Care. The fourth heading was Environment and Energy which included Water Supply Protection and Development and Solid Waste and Recycling.

Each of the eight topics was introduced in plenary session by a community leader. Later, in concurrent discussion groups, the issues were examined in depth. Many recommendations were made in the discussion groups and, in each case, it was decided that a task force should be established to flesh out the details of a plan of action.

Planning the Conference

In January, 1987, Mayor Upchurch enlisted former Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. to chair a steering committee to plan the conference. Governor Hunt agreed, on the condition that the conference would result in an action agenda. With that assurance from the Council of Governments' leaders, the steering committee was appointed. Sixty-four members participated actively in conference-planning meetings over the ensuing eleven months. The steering committee's work culminated in the identification of the eight issues named above as the areas in which action is needed. They also determined that regional

cooperation is necessary to successfully deal with these concerns.

The committee realized that they might be criticized for designing a conference around a pre-selected set of issues, rather than allowing the issues to be identified by conference participants. However, they were convinced that pre-selection would be necessary to focus the conference, and to come out with an agenda for specific actions that could be accomplished within a reasonably short time period. The committee felt that previous conferences to identify issues, while useful in illuminating those issues, did not always result in a practical plan of action with which to deal with them.

After the Conference

Task forces or "teams" have been formed around each of the eight issues. A leader has been appointed for each of the teams, and work plans and schedules have been adopted. Each of the eight issues is complex. Some of the teams have broken the issues down into sub-issues, and a "focus group" has been formed around each of them. The Regional Land Use Priorities Team is typical.

Regional Land Use Priorities Team

The charge to this team is to develop a regional land use plan, based on the plans adopted by cities and counties in the Region. At their first meeting, the team decided to approach the issue on four fronts – Open Space, Housing, Transportation and Economic Development. A focus group has been formed around each of these sub-issues to examine the relationship between land use patterns and each of these particular sub-issues.

Open Space Focus Group: The Triangle J Council of Governments has been developing an inventory of regionally significant open space independently from the work of this focus group. The focus group is now in the process

of expanding the inventory, to include privately-owned open space in particular. They will prepare and recommend a regional open space plan, including goals or standards, plan implementation measures, funding sources, a listing of principal agencies involved in open space and recreation, and other topics relating to the plan. These recommendations will be presented to the Regional Land Use Priorities Team.

Transportation Focus Group: This group is studying major employment and population centers, present and future, in order to formulate recommendations about the relationship of land use and transportation corridors. The larger cities in the Region have thoroughfare plans of fairly recent vintage (a major revision of the thoroughfare plan for the greater Durham/Chapel Hill/Carrboro urbanized area is now under review). The focus group has mapped locally-adopted thoroughfare plans.

Housing Focus Group: The Housing group will recommend regional housing goals and, based on expected income and population levels, will forecast the number and type of housing needed. As in most of the nation, an ever increasing number of the Region's families are caught in the housing squeeze. For several decades, the cost of housing has rapidly risen beyond the reach of both low and moderate income families in addition to many middle-income families.

Economic Development Focus Group: The location, size and quality of water supply facilities, sewers and other infrastructure can be a major determinant of land use and of the economic development of the Region. This focus group will examine the existing infrastructure systems and policies, and make appropriate recommendations.

Regional Transit Team

This team is working as a committee, to examine the legal, institutional and financial aspects of a regional public transit system. Although there are three intra-city bus systems in the region, they are not inter-connected. Intergovernmental agreements, whereby the three systems could be linked are one arrangement the team will investigate. Another possibility is a regional transportation authority, which would operate a bus service in the presently unserved portions of the region, and would assume the operation of the existing systems. The possibility of linking several cities with rail service, using existing tracks, will also be considered.

World Trade Center Team

The Triangle J region is increasingly linked to other nations through exporting by local firms, investment in the region by foreign firms, and international travel.² Keeping the wheels of world trade turning requires the expert services of lawyers, accountants, brokers, im-

porters, exporters, and other specialists. A world trade center would provide a central place for these specialists to meet and "network," facilitating the exchange and dissemination of information and assistance. In many trade centers, space is also provided for the display of local products for export. The World Trade Center Team is investigating the feasibility of establishing such a center in this region.

Regional Telephone System Team

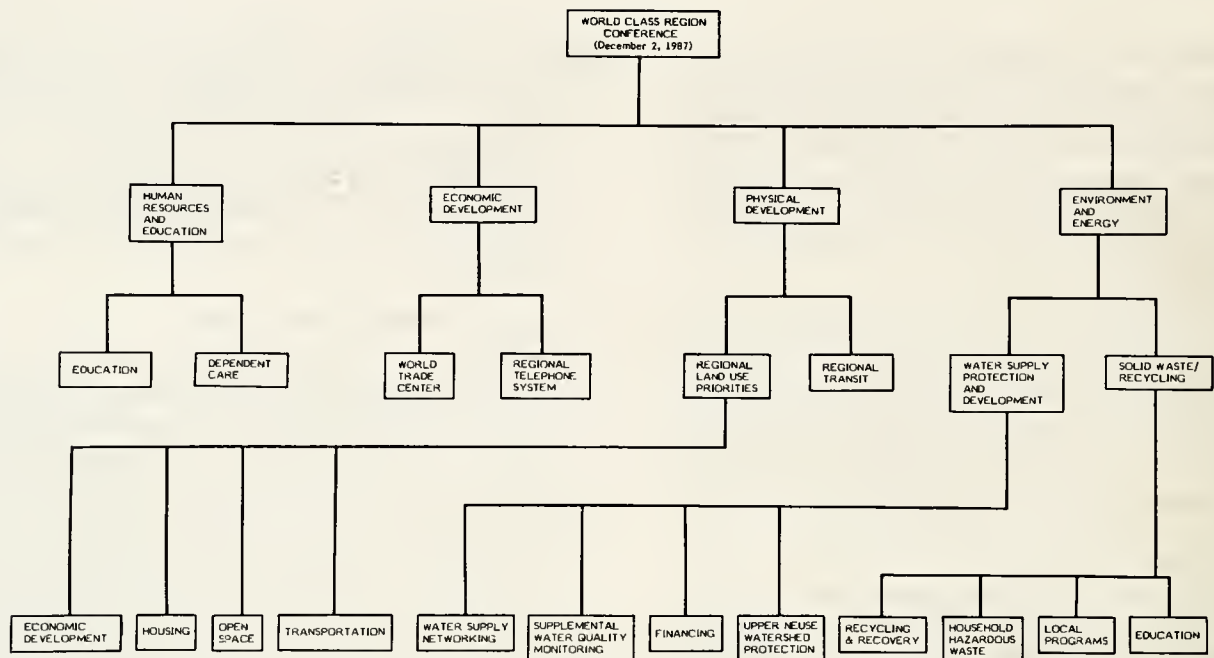
This team is working toward a toll-free telephone system throughout the region. Their first priority is to bring about such a system in the three most populous counties of the region (Durham, Orange and Wake), followed by expansion to interested communities in the region's other three counties (Chatham, Johnston and Lee). The team believes it should be as easy to phone from one end of the region to another as it is to phone from one end of town to another. Currently there are seven local telephone exchange companies serving the region. As a result, toll charges must be paid for calls between Chapel Hill, Durham and Raleigh. The team has filed a formal request with the NC Utilities Commission, has presented oral and written testimony at the Commission's hearing and awaits a ruling.

Education Team

Although quality education is recognized as one of the highest priorities of the region, the Triangle J Council of Governments has not previously had programs in education. Until now, most of the Council's programs have been directed at the physical and economic development of the region, and protection of the environment. Consequently, the education team started "from ground zero," and their objectives are not as well defined as those of some of the other teams. They have decided, however, that they will concentrate on long- and short-range strategies to strengthen K-12 education throughout the region. Possible strategies include establishing a model school to serve the region, or developing an educational network whereby business leaders, government officials or other individuals with special skills or expertise would share their knowledge with students.

Dependent Care Team

This program area is also a new one for the Council of Governments. The increasing number of families with both parents working outside the home has brought day care to the top of the priority list for this region and, indeed, for the entire nation. The increasing age of the population indicates a need for adult dependent care as well. To meet these needs, the dependent care team is pursuing several goals. Various approaches being considered



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Task force and focus group flow chart.

include: devising new ways of linking the education resources of public schools with the day care community; developing educational materials about dependent care; improving visibility within business and civic organizations on the need to expand dependent care options for employees; and convening a workshop on inter-agency cooperation relative to early education needs and responses.

Water Supply Protection and Development Team

The Council of Governments has maintained programs in water resources for years, especially in the preservation of water quality in the region's lakes and streams. This team has turned its attention to water supply. Focus groups are working on four key issues.

Water Supply Networking Focus Group: The B. Everett Jordan Reservoir in Chatham County has been approved by the State as a source of drinking water. However, none of the water has been allocated to the several units of government that have applied for it. In anticipation of the allocation process, this group is looking at alternative configurations of pipes and treatment plants to make the most efficient use of the Jordan Reservoir water supply. Several options have been developed, and are now being studied by the group.

Supplemental Water Quality Monitoring Focus Group: Although the water in the region is monitored by the State, this group believes the present monitoring program should be supplemented. The focus group is devising an

additional monitoring program for water supplies serving more than 90 percent of the region's municipal consumers.

Upper Neuse Watershed Protection Focus Group: The Falls of the Neuse Reservoir is the principal water supply for Raleigh. By contract, Raleigh provides treated water to many of the smaller towns in Wake County. Thus, the Reservoir is the source of water for most of the population of the County, yet most of the watershed is in upstream jurisdictions. Because the activities in a watershed can affect the quality of downstream water, this focus group is examining the land use/water quality relationships as they pertain to the Falls of the Neuse Reservoir.

Financing Focus Group: As a means of financing the regional water supply programs, this group is considering a recommendation that a surcharge be applied to local water bills.

Solid Waste Management Team

The Triangle J region has its own "garbage barge"—the landfills operated by the cities and counties in the region, which are being loaded with money and poison. The money is in the form of recyclable materials. The poison is household hazardous waste. The solid waste management team (often referred to as "Partners in Trash") has set two long-term goals: (1) reducing the volume of solid waste going into landfills by 25 percent over the next ten years and (2) diverting all hazardous materials away from landfills through environmentally sound disposal

programs. To accomplish these goals, the team has decided to focus its attention on three issues.

Recycling and Recovery: The primary objective in the recycling and recovery area is to implement recycling programs for yard wastes, white goods, tires, cardboard, and government office paper. Final programs may include sharing a wood chipper or contracting with a tire-shredding firm. Also being considered is a requirement that a certain percentage of paper products purchased by governmental agencies be from recycled paper. Finally, environmentalists, recycling firms, elected officials and beverage industry representatives are working together on the issue of mandatory deposit legislation, often referred to as a "bottle bill."

Household Hazardous Waste: This team is initially concentrating on waste oil, automobile batteries, paints and pesticides. They plan to work with the State to expand the pesticide collection program, and with local paint stores to arrive at ways to collect the half-empty paint cans sitting in garages, waiting for spring cleaning.

Education: Public education will be emphasized by this group, in order to increase awareness of the solid waste problem. A school curriculum, a media campaign, and a directory to include recycling and recovery programs, and educational resources are being compiled.

Coming Up

From the above synopsis, it is apparent that the World Class Region Conference was only an intermediate step in a process that began with the January, 1987, appointment of the steering committee, and is continuing into the future. More than 1,000 people from across the region and across all levels of expertise, are working on one or more of the teams and focus groups. They include scientists from the universities, representatives of business and civic groups, technical experts from state and local governments, elected officials, environmentalists, neighborhood activists and others with an interest in preserving the region's quality of life.

Each of the teams is operating on its own schedule, designed to produce a plan of action in 1988. The conference leaders will soon decide whether to hold a World Class Region Conference II in 1989. At this second conference, reports would be heard from each team. Throughout 1988, however, team leaders will be appearing before governing bodies in the region to get their input and comments.

The World Class Region process has already had some positive effects. Its extensive press coverage, both before and after the Conference, has made many more people aware of the issues dealt with in the process. In addition, it has brought people together from throughout the region, and stimulated thoughts about regional approaches to problems which, in many cases, defy solution by a single

unit of government. The cities in the region are constantly expanding their boundaries, and if past trends continue, they will someday merge into a single urban complex. If the region's citizens can find ways to address the issues discussed here, the regional community of the future will be more efficient, more attractive and will enjoy a higher level of services—both rural and urban—at minimum cost. In short, the quality of life will be preserved and enhanced. □

NOTES

1. The Triangle J Council of Governments is one of eighteen regional councils in North Carolina. It is a voluntary association of counties, cities and towns in the Triangle J Region. The Triangle J Region covers six counties and 36 cities and towns, and includes the State capital (Raleigh), the Research Triangle Park, three world class universities (Duke University in Durham, N.C. State University in Raleigh and UNC in Chapel Hill) and 800,000 residents.
2. Daily flights from the Raleigh-Durham Airport to Paris will begin in May, 1988, and to Germany in the Fall.

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