A New Urban Agenda
Daniel D. Luria and Joel Rogers

Cities and their surrounding innerring suburbs—what we will here call "metropolitan or urban" regions—are the new frontiers of American politics. More than half the population lives in them, and they suffer from all sorts of problems—from ghetto crime, unemployment, and racial segregation to environmentallydegrading fiscal and subsidized suburb sprawl—but they are not subjects of constructive political debate. Commonly, indeed, discussion of our urban areas serves only as an occasion to express despair about economic dysfunction and social disintegration, and the resistance of both to political remedy.

That despair is justified, we are just as commonly told, by an Iron Law of Urban Decay: As incomes rise, workers move to suburbs; when suburbs mature, they retire paying taxes to support the metro core, as the tax base declines and services deteriorate, the middle-class class flees, leading to further erosion; poverty concentrates among those left behind, and they become a fiscal and political liability to labor markets, without role models for advancement, lacking the human or financial capital even for bootstrappalling. In this context, we are told, the best that can be hoped for central cities is peace, or at least a segregation of the violence. The best that can be hoped for suburbia is...well, more suburbia. But further sprawl only erodes the tax base of inner-ring suburbs, weakening their residents between the spreading deterioration of the urban core and the new roads, sewers, and schools for their increasingly distant suburban "neighbors" on the edge. For their problems, angered inner-ring suburbs tend to blame their more proximate neighbors in the central cities, people generally poorer and darker than themselves. Meanwhile, the wealthy seek to insulate themselves—taking refuge in luxury urban high-rises, or cloistered condo communities, or exclusions "tavored quartez" of suburban development.

It is an ugly business, all the more so because it does not have to be this way. If we wanted, we could reconstruct our metropolitan regions. Taking full advantage of their dense concentrations of people, skill, and infrastructure, we could transform them from sites of hideous squalls, moral inequality, and nothing natural destruction to vibrant centers of high-wage, environmentallysustainable economic activity and civil social life. If we did, the benefits would be massive. Most directly, metro reconstitution would markedly improve the welfare of urban populations. More broadly, it would make substantial inroads on addressing the ruinous inequality and declining living standards that currently define national economic life. Finally, with the economy conditioning most of the rest of our lives together, such reconstitution would have large political and social benefits. We would regain some measure of democracy and social peace among the people of this country,

The benefits from reconstructing our metro regions would be massive.

making meaningful our now-fragile commitments to shared citizenship, by focusing resources where most people actually live. Despite these benefits, any serious project of reconstruction will need to be fought. That fight will require a wide-ranging alliance of interests; large numbers of people, now divided from one another, must be persuaded of their common stake in its success. And persuasion depends on the availability of a plausible project capable of uniting these different interests. Can such a project be states? We think so, and present a case for our affirmative answer here.

For reasons of space, we present the project schematically, without reference to the particular upheavals and historical precedents in cities as diverse as Milwaukee, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Portland, Seattle, and Cleveland—inspiring confidence in the possibilities of metro reconstruction. Furthermore, while we have included a host of details about what needs to be done and by whom, we understand that such details are provisional: the best way to proceed will undoubtedly differ from case to case, and, as projects of this kind unfold, we will learn more about the relative advantages of alternative strategies. Still, enough is known now about what works, and what does not, that a new urban agenda can be stated. And the stakes are high enough to think, we believe not irrationality, that urban politics and policy might once again be rescued from obscurity and despair, and made an issue for political debate and popular mobilization.

Before getting to that agenda and its politics, however, we need first to make the case that something is worth doing, and how it can in fact be done—that the Iron Law of Urban Decay is imposed by political forces, not nature.

Why Save Cities?
How did cities get into their current mess? There is no simple answer, but an important piece of the puzzle lies in American public policy. That policy is, in a word, anti-urban. A bias against cities, evident in contemporary public discourse, is a longstanding feature of the American political economy, and plays a central role in our tax code, major economic development programs, government purchasing, and other exercises of public power.

The Bias
In contrast to most developed capitalist nations, American public policy slants urban centers in favor of suburban homes, urban bus and subway riders in favor of suburban automobiles, and urban infrastructure in favor of exurban and rural development projects. Simultaneously, we do not require non-metro regions to pay the costs of maintaining the poor and dispossessed who are left behind by such acts of favoritism. Whether this anti-urbanism originated in genuine concern about diverting the wealth of different regions, or in racism, or in some misapplied notion that the happier life was always found behind the wheel of an automobile, the general effect has been inartificially lowering the costs to individuals and firms—of living and working outside our metro regions, while artificially increasing the costs of living and working within them.

Though it is hard to calculate precisely, the subsidy to non-urban regions is on all counts considerable—annually, on the order of tens if not hundreds of billions. We have spent trillions building non-metro roads, but nowhere near that on metro ones or mass transit. Federal annual funding for mass transit has never been more than one-fifth of highway funding, and state ratios are even more unbalanced. The overwhelming share of federal and state economic development programs also goes to non-metro sites—more highways, sprawl-supporting infrastructure, exurban tax credits and lowinterest loans for new development. Similarly, the deliberate siting of military bases and other government facilities outside cities or more developed regions has been and remains deliberate national policy.

So public policy substantially reduces the costs of living and investing outside metro areas, and thus encourages people to make these choices. But why should anyone object? Leave aside narrow questions of equity—why, for example, metro residents should be taxed, often regrettably, for programs that hurt them. Leave aside aesthetic and cultural disagreements about whether

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Joshua Cohen

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individual firms, they need to be provided socially. We have not provided them.

**Back to More**

Here is where metro areas come in. Whatever their present difficulties, metropolitan economies are the natural base for a highroad economy. To the extent that we now have any "highroad" production and service delivery in the United States, it is already heavily concentrated in metropolitan regions. Moreover, this correlation between metro regions and the highroad strategy is no accident; a highroad strategy must be a metro strategy because the high road requires the sheer density of people and firms that is definitive of metro regions.

Metro density helps high-riding in three ways. First, density facilitates worker organization by providing the proximity and sheer numbers needed to support the infrastructure of new organizing. Worker organization, in turn, directly helps to close off the low road by obstructing its impulse to wage-reduction. And worker organizations help pave the high road too. Without the knowledge and cooperation of workers, firms will find high-riding all but impossible—but both are easier to secure if workers are organized and confident that they will also benefit from increased quality and productivity.

Density also helps firms more directly. Economists, geographers, and economic development analysts use the concept of "agglomeration" to describe the benefits in skills, productivity, and consumer access that result when particular activities are concentrated in particular places. In addition, firms in such regions don't just happen to be near each other; they are a regional labor market. They do business with each other in a way that connects them as if, in some ways, they were complementary plants of a single enterprise. Agglomeration are in turn associated with "increasing returns" on any given investment. When a single firm in one of these agglomerations improves its cost and quality performance, it creates a competitive advantage for the customers and suppliers in its cluster. Simplicity, put, firms learn more and faster from each other.

Finally, density helps relieve the costs of providing the public goods (again, quality public education and training institutions, formal support for cross-learning and upgrading among firms, integrated regional labor market services and worker credentialing systems, modern forms of transport, energy, water supplies, and communication linkages) on which such advanced production depends. It is much easier and cheaper to supply such goods with the human and material resources that density provides.

So here, in brief, is the argument: To combat further inequality and wage decline, we need to generalize a highroad competitive strategy. Getting firms to adopt and stick with that strategy will require a more demanding and road framework for competition (closing off the low road) and a variety of specific supporting services and institutions (pavement for the high road). Neither can be supplied by individual firms acting alone. Density is the midwife to their achievement. And density means metro. A fair economic future, in short, depends on the viability of our urban areas.

**How to Do It**

But are metro regions really viable? What would it take to repel the Iron Law, and the anti-urban bias of public policy, to capture the natural advantages of density, and turn our policies more deliberately to building the infrastructure for highroad competition? Putting aside all-important questions of political will (we return to them later) and focusing on the issue of public policy, the answer proceeds on two related tracks: we need a new array of policies for federal and state governments, and—coordinated with them—a new set for economic regions.

**Track One**

At the federal and state levels of government, the essential tasks are to keep states and communities pursuing a competitive race to the bottom, raise minimum standards on firm performance, and get out of the way of the organizing needed to realize gains from cooperation. None of this need imply any new public expenditures. What it would mean is that federal and state governments would:

1. Remove subsidies to low-riding firms. As an initial step, governments should announce that they will not award contracts or development grants to firms paying wages below some minimum level (say, sub-poverty wages), or polling above a certain level, or with a record of illegal resistance to worker organization. They should then move to mandate such standards generally, and gradually raise them. For example, placing in a massively increased minimum wage—say, $10 an hour within 5 years—would do wonders for shutting down the low-road option and requiring firms to compete by improving quality. (Of course, there is no point urging firms onto a high road only to push them off a cliff. So this first element must be understood and treated as part of the larger project.)
2. Discourage "sitting where between and within states. Governments often spend billions simply to lure business from one region to another, with no net gain for the national economy. One way to discourage this practice would be to tax or discourage bids at the highest level of government (the federal government taking the states, the states their local governments), or condition aid from those higher units on the lower one's participation in non-aggression pacts with colleagues. Of course, one region's "subsidy" is another's "investment for the future." So we need criteria to distinguish genuine investment that might also be expected...
to lure firms—for example, spending for better educational systems—from offshore and abroad. But this task is not insurmountable, and even agreement on basic guidelines for the most extreme (if common) forms of current subsidies—e.g., those drawn through regressive taxes on people who are not aided by the resulting employment—would represent a big advance.

(3) Target development supports to regions on a per capita basis. As a general rule of public policy, we should spend the money where the people are, thus encouraging local governments to increase density rather than avoid it. And let the natural agglomerations of people and firms be rewarded by letting them retain a larger share of their individual tax dollars for collective self-improvement. Here too there are important issues of design. We don’t want incentives to agglomeration to be so intense as to encourage overcrowding or in-sustainable population growth within regions. But the basic idea of removing disincentives to otherwise naturally-occurring agglomeration provides some guidance, and even modest progress toward per capita equalization seems justified on economic and social, as well as democratic grounds.

(4) Encourage the growth of economic development authorities on a functional, regional basis. While more than half the population lives in what we’ve been calling strong regions, only 6 percent is subject to any significant metro governance. Moreover, the sheer number of sovereign sub-jurisdictions in these regions commonly poses formidable barriers to planning. The Chicago metropolitan region, for example, includes 265 separate municipalities, 1,200 separate tax districts, and parts of six different megacounties. State and federal government could provide incentives for more regional administrative structures—which are needed minimally for basic infrastructure development—by making development aid and other supports by higher levels of government contingent on the development of such structures lower down. In very few cases is there actual dispute about what the boundaries of the regional economy are; the problem has been an absence of national or state leadership in fostering regional frameworks for economic development and planning.

(5) Directly encourage high-roads. In all aspects of economic development spending, infrastructure support, pollution prevention and abatement programs, and the like, we need regional strategies that take the subsidiary policy steps needed to move toward high-road production. Comparative progress toward the high road is measurable. If measurable, it should be measured, with receipt of special federal monies contingent on achieving progress. And, independent of what the states do, the federal government should itself be much more attentive to targeting its resources to encourage high-roads. It should target aid to integrated regions, clusters within them, firms within those clusters. The lead federal “manufacturing extension” agency—charged with upgrading the performance of the small and medium-sized shops that provide eleven-tenths of every ten manufacturing jobs—spends $100 million a year, and could reach literally tens of thousands of small and medium-sized manufacturers, already supplying (or trying to supply) to high-road clusters, if that money were appropriately targeted on metro agglomerations.

Together, these five elements would work to remove the anti-urban and low-road bias from contemporary state and federal policy; they would encourage 18th- and 19th-century jurisdictions to consider the realities of late 20th-century regional economic development; and they would encourage both firms and regions to exploit the advantages of density.

Thai Test

Higher levels of government, however, can only do so much to foster metro reconstruction. To be sure, moving the national economy onto a high road would be of manifest national benefit. But a high road policy must take its cue in the cities; cities themselves must play a large role in designing and implementing it. What, then, should the regions do?

The short answer is that they need to break squarely with the conventional economic development strategy (henceforth, CEDS) still pursued by most cities and counties—the strategy that lies behind the Iron Law of Decay—in favor of a high-road project that takes full advantage of metro density. To fill out this answer, let’s distinguish CEDS and our alternative on five dimensions.

(1) What Kind of Jobs? CEDS adapts to the strategy of promoting job growth without concern for the kind of jobs generated—which usually means promoting low-wage jobs. But low-wage jobs drag down wages elsewhere, encourage further low-roads, and away at the margin of struggling high-road firms, and draws on the tax base (the employers providing them still need basic infrastructure, and the employees occupying them still need basic services) without proportionately contributing to it. Tax base erosion, in turn, leads to cutbacks in public goods and suburban flight; the Iron Law again. Nevertheless, the strategy is invariably self-defeating; as the city gets more qualitative, desperation fuels the view that jobs, any jobs at all, are what is needed, and the thought that the only alternative to low-wage employment is no employment at all.

A natural alternative is to direct dollars only to jobs of a certain kind, while building up the latter. Relating to policies of opportunities and constraints, localities should make it easier for “good” employers to stay and expand—through the provision of a variety of services and opportunities for their improvement and competitiveness—while making it harder for “bad” employers to do so—by insisting on certain standards on wages, pollution prevention, and so on. Such a policy could start by setting conditions on the receipt of government contracts and economic development support and—especially supported by our new state and federal framework discouraging a “race to the bottom” between regions—move to mandates on private activity.

(2) Attractions or Incentives? CEDS focuses on attracting business rather than retaining and renewing the existing base of firms. It squanders one of the greatest assets of density, which is the natural grouping of similar firms—a “natural knit” for the cross-learning, joint production, and other mutual support that proximity provides—in distinct industries or industry clusters. Mature metropolitan economies thrive when their core businesses upgrade, link to one another, or attract spinoff related enterprises that benefit from spatial proximity to

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existing industry leaders. But, as emphasized earlier, upgrading, networking, and insourcing indigenous firms requires an infrastructure of support (technical assistance, training, and the efficient supply of modern public goods). And it is proving difficult in the long run much more satisfying, in the short run it is easier to attract another Walmart. The principle becomes self-confirming as negative or "death by diffusion" leads to decline in existing sources of wealth, making the attraction of new and different firms more compelling as an option.

Our alternative development strategy would focus on upgrading, linkage, and incubation of existing firms—with local authorities investing in the infrastructure needed to realize gains from agglomeration. Through "early warning" difficult, networks, they would recruit firms and workers to monitor the signs of distress in challenged firms, and develop the technical and financial intervention wherewithal to save jobs worth saving. At the same time, they would actively promote cross-firm learning and sectoral growth by encouraging firms to join together in marketing their products and training workers. And, drawing on the accumulated pension and other savings in the region, they would develop a regional investment fund to support such intervention, increase community ownership of businesses doing business there, and support promising spin-offs and incubation centers.

(3) Generalized "Targeted Benefits." CEDS relies on generic tax abatements and other fiscal giveaways, rather than targeted breaks and regulation. Again, best evidence is that such enterprise-specific-type development models simply do not work, and eventually erode the city's fiscal base. The jobs generated are saddeh high-paying or associated with significant capital investment; the firms take the benefits and move on. In contrast, much evidence suggests that by a gradual tightening of regulatory controls on production standards—whether minimum labor costs or emissions standards—business can be encouraged to innovate in ways that improve both productivity and the quality of community life in the process. However, requires a willingness to impose significant costs on current business, while insulating it from competition from non-complying competitors. Most city governments have been unwilling to trade the one to make this crucial step. The result, however, is a race to the bottom among jurisdictions who offer escalating packages of incentives for investments firms had already decided to make.

Our alternative would set performance conditions on the receipt of public funds— ty subsidies to the achievement of specific ends—and "claw back" those funds from firms that do not meet these conditions. The more effective the support from the government and allied private institutions, of course, the more effective the demand that could reasonably be made on the firms receiving it.

(4) What Role for Markets? CEDS sees greater public control and accountability as bad for the economy, and it worries when unions and community organizations put pressure on economic policy. Starting from the largely correct perspective that government and the government sector seeks to work with the region, or the provision of training. More often than commonly thought, however, it would simply mean fostering cooperation among existing interests, or simply convening discussion of common problems—and generalizing to the wider enterprise world, a large number of the enterprises and are collectively have the resources to solve many of them, but who necessarily have had no incentive or support from public authorities in solving them together. In such situations government in effect says: "Here's a problem that we all know exists; you design a feasible solution accountable to the following values and show me how to pay for it; we will then pass a law making sure nobody defies the necessary deal." Consider the effects of systematically putting a program of this kind the federal and state reforms, as well as the invention of CEDS just described. Sprawl would be reduced, planning capacity would rise, wages would increase and inequalities decrease, neighborhood goods would become less segregated and safe, public goods would become much more abundant; democracy would be more evidently show its contribution to the economy. And, as with any good strategy, it would be self-reinforcing: As subsidies to growth decrease, the attractions of metropolitan locations rise; as investment returns to metro

That so many initiatives are already in motion suggests a wide-ranging potential alliance out there, waiting to be organized.

cores, productivity within them increases, making higher wages more affordable; as organization of the real cluster basis of the economy proceeds, standards for job entry and advancement can be formalized and publicized, which helps to equalize wages; better wages secure the tax base; that helps pay for higher-cost public goods which with further reduce inequality and attract high-rental firms; with more abundant public goods and better job access, central city residents look less "different," further promoting racial and economic and with greater spatial region power over something employers really want—skilled labor, infrastructure, technical assistance, credit—the ability of regions to discipline free-rider and defectors from common norms (e.g., on fair housing and hiring, land use, tax-base sharing) rise. In the limiting case, the economy actually serves the people, rather than the people struggling to serve an anonymous and immoral economy.

Who Can Do It? But who could pull this all together? And is it reasonable to hope that they might? Part of the answer is that it is happening already in the county, you can find different pieces of the project we have re-
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The same low-wage sprawl that has almost destroyed the central cities is now destroying the region. And both central and inner-ring recognize their common interest in getting the rich suburbs to carry their share of regional burdens. Finally, metro business itself, at least that part of it that cannot easily flee (for example, because of existing collective bargaining agreements, or pension obligations, or heavy sunk investment in plant and equipment), is interested, like any good business, in limiting competition to itself, interested in particular in eliminating the low-readers now taking away their margins.

Put these forces together in any metro region—and the program outlined here has a real chance of benefiting all of them—and you have a powerful political coalition.

Again, we’re only talking about what we might reasonably hope for. As with any good, lots of obstacles might obstruct its achievement. But material interest strongly supports this grand coalition. And recent experience in mobilizing directly on that interest—the grand Jacques Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee, or legislative efforts at more tax-base sharing in the Twin Cities, or the more business-led efforts in Louisville or Cleveland—suggest the possibilities of real movement. What is most urgently needed are some enterprising politicians, labor leaders, savvy community organizers, or sensible metro businesspeople to get in front of a parade that’s waiting to form.

And if people get organized, elected officials can be made to follow. In getting the relevant state and federal policy supports, the graveren of success is simply stated: an alliance of the city and inner-ring suburban delegations—still, in combination, a clear majority in Congress and most state legislatures—to press the general interest against recalcitrant rich suburbs and low-road firms. If the general interest doesn’t move those delegations, the fact that their respective constituencies are getting unfair and jointly savaged should. Someone should invite our currently divided metro officials into a room together, show them a few numbers, and point to the large mixed crowd of constituents preparing to march outside.
Is This the Right Plan?  
Four responses to "A New Urban Agenda."

Political Barriers  
J. Phillip Thompson

Dan Luria and Joel Rogers present a compelling vision of how we can revitalize our national economy by paying attention to our existing growth centers (mainly in cities), raising wages levels through union organizing, and popularizing debate on economic and fiscal policies. Their article amply demonstrates the economic irrationality of many government development policies. However, it suggests that a "paradigm" is "just waiting for form" for the New Urban Agenda, and that all that is needed is "enterprising politicians, labor leaders, savvy community organizers, or sensible metro businesspeople to get in front." This view underrates the political barriers to implementing a metropolitan vision. Moreover, it is unclear to me how the New Urban Agenda will address racial difference and persistent poverty.

Luria and Rogers emphasize that anti-urban policies violate the "democratic" principle that policy should be "for the people," because the majority of Americans live in urban areas. However, our political system has anti-majoritarian institutions. The US Senate is a prime example. Each state elects two senators, regardless of the population. Senators from small and sparsely populated rural states wield disproportionate influence in the Senate, generally against urban interests. Similarly, governors are elected from states that are irrational economic units, often combining suburban and rural populations to the political detriment of cities. While government development policies may not be economically rational or politically democratic, they are consistent with the way we structure policies. These long-standing political structures, and many of the politicians that inhabit them, are a forceful voice against change. It is therefore hard to imagine a New Urban Agenda without fundamental political reform.

The vast majority of elected officials are state and local legislators. They number in the hundreds of thousands. A majority of them represent urban areas, and a sizable fraction are in central cities. Given their sheer numbers, urban legislators would appear to be natural advocates for the Urban Agenda. So, if the distribution of state economic benefits is as prejudicial as Luria and Rogers maintain, why aren't urban legislators crying across the country?

I offer several explanations. First, state legislators tend to be quite parochial, in part because they are individually elected from geographically small districts. They have small budgets and can seldom afford to hire policy experts, nor do they have the capacity to monitor mammoth bureaucracies and complex regulations that shape policy. Given majority vote rules and governor's veto power in state legislatures, legislators from cities can only have impact when they band together. Often they do not. These factors converge to engender a cumulative self-defeating, negative political culture, that I call "retrograde representation." Lacking a policy staff, or policy resources, it is hard for legislators to know what to advocate. Without a policy vision, there is little basis for forming stable political coalitions with other urban legislators. In the absence of strong unified political coalitions, it is hard to change policies. If they cannot subvert or influence major policies, urban legislators have little by way of a track record at home. With an insufficient grasp of policy issues and an inability to impact major policies, why talk to voters about issues that focus on visceral symbolic issues like locking up criminals, or non-policy issues like broken street lamps. There is also the matter of race. Luria and Rogers describe white racism as a primary cause for anti-urban bias historically and suggest that it can be overcome by understanding common economic interests. This optimistic view ignores the structural aspects of racial hegemony embedded in our political system, and consequently overlooks the role that African Americans must themselves play in the fate of cities. Why should whites change their racial practices, and who is going to make them? The notion that white Americans will rebel against urban policies because they are immoral and anti-majority rings hollow, particularly given African American history. The dispositional political question is not whether policies are bad for the majority, but whether they are bad for the majority of whites. Can a majority of whites be moved to think of their destiny as tied to that of African Americans and other minorities? This is the critical issue in the metropolitan political mix. It may be no accident that movements toward regionalized urban government and policymaking had their greatest success in the Midwest, where white populations are most dominant within regions. The argument that economic self-interest will prevail over racism, when social arguments fail, is an old one. But history teaches us that while America will not change in habits simply on its own. Democratic advances have always—and especially in this century—required strong African American participation and leadership.

The need for African American leadership and mass participation in the quest for democratic advances sharply raises the issue of black leadership and power in cities. As to both, the current situation is dismal. I do not mean this as a personal criticism of black elected officials: universal failure cannot be personal. The problem is historical and structured into our political system. In our nation's history, African Americans have had little experience in democracy and hence in deciding policy. While little power and policymaking experience they have gained has been recent and concentrated in cities. The lack of policy experts who can translate African American aspirations into technical criteria is a profound weakness that has handicapped black administrations and legislators across the country. Even more important, two hundred years of racial exclusion in policymaking has so deeply embedded racial discrimination within the fabric of our transportation, housing, education, corporate, electoral, and medial structures that such discrimination has come to be accepted as a natural state of affairs. I therefore would not agree more with Luria and Rogers that politicizing public policy is of critical importance. Why haven't black elected officials, the bulk of whom are legislators, been doing this? Why aren't movement already evident in the black community? I would suggest that African American legislators suffer from the "retrograde representation" syndrome that I described earlier. At its worst, African American legislators in majority black districts are reduced to a brute, barren, and anti-democratic symbolic nationalism, one that substitutes identity for interest, and dehumanizes all political competition. Equally retrograde is the "de-institutionalized" black politics adopted by some black candidates who abandon black voters' core issues to attract white voters. No wonks inside-city African Americans are cynical and direct.

Is there a trend toward the retrograde representation syndrome, and a role for black politics in the metropolitan future? I think so. Reviving local democratic institutions is the bridge to a shared New Agenda. Here is the first step. Develop governmental functions from the city level to the community level. This is a broad demand. Although not absolute, it is crucial. We need a different model for how government should work, one that increases efficiency and at the same time gives citizens more control over local government. The new model would move resources to the community level—which means that quality administrators would be paid to build strong community institutions that understand the realities and conditions of their neighborhoods. These local institutions would reach out to regional businesses and government service agencies to connect residents with outside resources and opportunities. The government model we use now, with its large centralized bureaucracies that are disconnected from communities, creates chaos and confusion in communities. For example, duplication of social services in some poor neighborhoods results in some kids getting the same medical treatment four or five times from different agencies, while other kids are completely overlooked. Moreover, big bureaucracies are less responsive to local law-makers, making both the agencies and the decisions bureaucratic, unaccountable and functionally corrupt, and rendering local democracy largely superfluous.

The current political climate and recent legislative trends—for example, recent "welfare-to-work" laws—make devolution of some government functions to the community level feasible. The legislation requires persons on welfare to find employment. Moving people off welfare (after clearing off the easy cases) will require intensive case management, screening, drug treatment, day care, medical assistance, education and training, and providing other services connecting the unemployed to employers. All of these services must be integrated to make the system work. Such hand-on management and system integration is beyond the capacity of mega-bureaucracies. Quality institutions are urgently needed at the community level. Moreover, to be effective, such local institutions have to connect themselves to regional businesses (and jobs) from the outset. Elected officials should be made accountable for the performance of these local agencies. If the agencies are situated in the community, local officials will have difficulty avoiding their responsibility.

I suggest three measures as a beginning for a renewed emphasis on local democracy that goes way beyond elections—to the creation of locally grounded, accessible, and accountable public institutions that can make a difference in the day to day lives of ordinary people. Such a vision is especially needed for African Americans, who fought so hard for the right to vote, and are now so disappointed with the results. African American elected officials, and other central-city legislators, can help lead the way to a metropolitan future. To do so, they need the help of school principals, police captains, welfare administrators, and housing managers who are fully accountable to community residents—through their locally elected officials. When local legislators are made substantially accountable for schools, police, housing, and other functions in communities, there will indeed be a politicalizing of local policies led by those who are now least active in metropolitan politics. Those with the greatest stake in fundamental transformation must themselves show it is possible.
The Need for Coalition
Myron Orfield

In this very impressive article, Lucia and Rogers seek to connect the nascent regional movement with a more effective economic development strategy that seeks to improve the economy and promote individual opportunity. I know more about regionalism than economic development, so I will concentrate my remarks on the former.

Lucia and Rogers argue that cities are important and that it is important to stop their decline for reasons of morality and economic cost. Both are valid reasons. However, the most compelling political motivation comes from the rapid decline of inner-ring suburbs, the stagnation of blue-collar employment, and the consequent policies of self-interest.

Contrary to popular belief, socioeconomic isolation does not stop neatly at central-city borders. As it crosses into inner suburbs, especially into suburbs that were once blue-collar and middle-class neighborhoods, it accelerates and intensifies. Older working-class suburban communities have less hope for the future than the cities they surround. Though central cities get hit first by social and economic change, they have a fiscal, governmental, and social infrastructure to slow these powerful trends. In contrast, inner suburbs lack the central city's business district, elite neighborhood tax base, social welfare and police infrastructure, and network of organized political activity. Once the trouble hits, they often decline far more rapidly.

Further, while favored-quartet suburbs (generally 25-35 percent of the population of a metropolitan region) get virtually all of the new development infrastructure and truly prosper, the patterns of metropolitan polarization play a cruel joke on most middle- and lower-middle-income families seeking a better life at the edge of the region. As they flee the socioeconomic dislocations of the central cities, they end up in rapidly growing school districts with small tax bases. Because their tax base is inadequate and their neighborhoods have throngs of young children needing to go to school, their local governments will build almost anything that stands simply to pay the bills. In part perhaps because of overcrowding and minimal spending per pupil, these districts have some of the highest dropout and lowest college attendance rates in their region.

Despite all these troubles, however, the creation of a coalition between the central cities and inner, low-tax-base suburbs is no mean feat. These middle-income (often working-class) suburbs, which have been a loose cannon politically since 1958, hold the balance of power on regional issues and arguably on most political issues in the United States. Our most distinguished political commentators have written about the central significance of this group in holding and maintaining a ruling political coalition.

On the merits, these middle-income, blue-collar suburbs are the largest prospective winners in regional reform. To them,

The central problem is how to rebuild a coalition between cities and suburbs.

What stands in the way of this coalition, however, are long-term, powerful resentments and distrust, based on class and race and fueled by every political campaign since Hubert Humphrey lost the White House in 1968 and Archie Bunker became a Republican.

I think this is the central problem: rebuilding a spatial and economic coalition between the central city and the struggling suburbs and their residents. I think that this will aid in both regionalism and economic reform. But for the reasons I mentioned, we have our work cut out for us.

As to the second broad thrust of the article—high road vs. low road development—I need to be educated. As a practical politician, I have been disgusted with low-road strategies. But I have also been hard put to tell poor, struggling communities, from which all economic activity is leaving, to wait for a better policy or not to act. Here we need a concrete transitional program. Further, I believe, but do not know, that solving these problems will require a powerfully reinvigorated labor movement; that as the world economy becomes seamless, we must use some of the profits to educate and train our workforce and cushion the impact of the transition; and that a metropolitan and national policy that discourages bidding wars between cities, states, and suburbs and leads to equity among jurisdictions could help. We need more discussion on these issues; Lucia and Rogers are to be commended for starting it.
Labor’s Role
Richard A. Feldman

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In their analysis of the roots of urban de-
cay, some researchers have focused on American public policy. Their claims about
the importance of policy in explaining de-
cay are debatable: one could argue that out-
migration from cities has been a norm in the United States since the 1960s, and that the fed-
eral government supported decentralization to
increase survivability of a nuclear attack or
that real estate developers, mortgage in-
terest deductions, and Internal Revenue
Code homeostatic capital gains in some cases
have had a far bigger effect than regional
economic development policy.1 But
whichever it is, the current pattern of
urban decline (including deindustrialization and
dematuration) is disastrous for work-
ers: loss of livable wage jobs, longer commu-
nutes to lower paying jobs, higher housing
prices, and sprawl-induced environmental
degradation of water, land, and air. We have
no choice but to do what we can within our
regions to change this pattern.

Luria and Rogers are right to think that
these are real possibilities to build coalitions in
support of such regional efforts. In Seattle,
for example, labor (through the King Coun-
ty Labor Council, AFL-CIO), and the Sea-
day-King County Building Trades Council,
AFL-CIO has actively supported growth-
management laws. That support put us on
the same side of the table as rural and sprawl-activists writ-
ing to preserve open space and farms by
fighting green field development, as well as good gov-
ernment advocates; we were opposed by the
usual array of subdivision developers,
mall-minders, and corporate land-use
lawyers. Labor in particular has used
growth management protected and supported our
scarce industrial land and its unionized liv-
able-wage job base. We were also successful
in catalyzing the multiparty Downswish
Coalition to address contaminating land,
water quality, and job retention issues in
Seattle’s industrial heartland.

So alliances on economic strategy are
possible, and they are important. But build-
ing them will tell us whether they will not
happen if we think that lots of people are
timelessly milling around, mutually anti-
gonizing each other, waiting for an enterpris-
ing leader to pick up the flag and snap them
into a concrete action in pursuit of their
own interests. Labor in particular has much
work to do building bridges and bases before we
can depend on self-interest to bind us into
a grand alliance. The problem is that labor
is not now thought of as a natural part of an
anti-sprawl alliance, nor does its agenda
seem ready to be in that alliance. The sources of the
trouble—some of which are now being

1 Section 1034 of the Internal Revenue Code en-
enables householders to shelter capital gains only
if they purchase a home at least equal in price to
the one they have sold. In urban areas, home
values increase with distance from the center;
so the provision encouraged movement
out and away from the center. A study of the
Cleveland area found that 81 percent of home-
ellers moved away from the city center, and of those
that complied 84 percent moved further out.
"The IRS Houselholders Capital Gain Provision;
Contributor to Urban Decline," Ohio House-
ing Research Network.

The Real Case for Density
Margaret Weir

At least since the 1950s, concern about
the pattern of sprawl in metropolitan ar-
as has sparked calls for reform. Critics have
charged that sprawl is irrational, promotes
racial inequality, and wastes public resources.
Luria and Rogers give this old argument a
new twist by tying the case against suburban
sprawl to the quest for the "high road" in pro-
duction and service delivery. Although their
new arguments about the benefits of densi-
ety are not wholly convincing, many of the
older reasons for stemming sprawl remain
considerable force. Furthermore, despite
formidable obstacles, there are some politi-
cal openings for moving in that direction.
The argument concerning increased den-
sity on the high road of economic develop-
ment is not persuasive. First of all, Luria and
Rogers’s observation that metro areas con-
tain much of the existing high-road devel-
opment is problematic because they note
together (in footnote 1) that metro regions con-
tain more than half of the population; given
this broad understanding of metro, the over-
lap of metro and high-road development can
hardly be a surprise. Moreover, many of the
most celebrated agglomerations—for ex-
ample, Massachusetts’s Route 128 or Cali-
fornia’s Silicon Valley—are classic products
of what is conventionally understood as sub-
urban sprawl. If they count as metro, then
the category is fairly meaningless; if they don’t,
then the connections of metro and agglomera-
tion are suspect. Second, many of the mea-
Sures Luria and Rogers propose for moving to
the high road—for example, hefty increases
in the minimum wage and increased unem-
ployment insurance—could be similarly relin-
quished by their constituents—and urban
politicans fearful of losing power in regional
entities, the political alliance for preserving
the status quo is impressive. Still, I think there
are some promising moves to moving the

2 The Union Cities resolution challenges CIUs
to reemerge and to commit to pursue right goals:
1. Signing half of its local union affili-
ates on to a program coordinated with
their international to shift 30 percent
of the local’s resources into organizing;
2. Developing a rapid response/soli-
darity team to support worker struggles in
the community;
3. Reaching a membership growth rate of
three percent per year by 2000;
4. Organizing grassroots labor com-
munity political action committees in
each legislative district;
5. Sponsoring an economics education
program for a majority of affiliated
local unions;
6. Building public support for the right
of workers to join unions by sponsoring a
city council resolution and by urging
candidates to pledge to support or
organizing;
7. Ensuring diversity in the entire struc-
ture of the CIUs;
8. Working with community allies on
economic development strategies that es-

tablish community standards for local
industries and public investment.

3 See for example Cheryl Barefoot, Employment
Strategies for Urban Communities: How to Con-
nect Low-Income Neighborhoods with Good Jobs

ed on; they are not seen as partners in efforts
to increase economic opportunity. (We will
know that we have arrived when the Aspen
Institute or the Ford Foundation publishes a
study on innovative ways to increase
unemployment in low-wage industries, the use
of Taft-Hartley trusts to fund housing for
housework, or the use of economically targeted
investments by pension funds.) Labor
needs to creatively and boldly define how it
will organize in the community to pro-
mote social and economic justice for all
workers. Labor, in short, must not be able
to do this properly if it operates in a vacuum or
is neglected by other potential allies.
Luria’s own revitalization needs to be
directly linked to urban revitalization. Luria
and Rogers have taken an important step by
presenting a program of metro reconstruc-
tion that includes such linkage. But it’s not
necessary that economic self-interest alone
keeps people up behind such a program. We
have some important political work to do in
developing and understanding each other’s in-
terests and potentials before the grand (and
necessary) alliance will be fully realized. ■
Luria and Rogers Reply

These perceptive and thoughtful comments show broad agreement with the economic and policy arguments we make in our piece—that metro regions warrant attention as economic units, and will more than pay that attention back for the nation as a whole as well as for their occupantsthat federal and state policies should be changed to remove subsidies to sprawl and inter-regional competition for business; that local governments should break with CEDs and start to build the infrastructure of high-road economic reconstruction. Nor is there disagreement that high-road administration requires much more active role in the economy for popular organizations (beginning with organizations of workers), much less with the central political parties dominating suburbanites and central city residents have common material interests sufficient to undermine their alliance. From us diverse a group as this, that is a striking level of agreement.

If the comments have an edge, it is with our apparent slighting of the barriers to building the high-road metro coalition. Phil Thompson notes many hard reasons—from the irrationalities of present political structures to the embedded economics of racism—why suburban and central city politicians have not gotten together on this project. Myron Orfield, reporting from the trenches, cautions on the volatility of intra-suburban alliances in it—even at-home—they take time and organizational work to trust and get it done that is more than enough to warrant getting started in earnest. Metro reconstruction is not just a nice idea. It is the central spatial dimension of any productive, egalitarian society. Those guided by these values should recognize that fact more clearly, and focus more clearly on realizing the possibility of which it describes. And with urban squatter and national inequality hitting all-time highs, they need to do that now.

Like God,
you hover above the page staring down on a small town. By its roads some scenery loafs in a hammock of sleepy prose and here is a mongrel loping and here is a train pulling into a station in three long sentences and here are the people in galoshes waiting. But you know this story and it is not about those travelers and their galoshes, but about your life, so, like a diver climbing over the side of a boat and down into the ocean, you dive, sentence by sentence, into this story on this page.

You have been expecting yourself as the woman who sorts by in a dress by Fortun and a poiret trimmed to the luggage, and a marron bulley as the Britannia, and there, haunting her ankles like a piece of ectoplasm that bats is, once again, that small white dog from chapter twenty. Those are your fellow travelers and you become part of their legion of images of hats and umbrellas and Vuitton luggage, you are a face behind or inside these faces, a heartbeat in the valley of these heartbeats, as you choose, out of all the passengers, the journey of a man with a mustache scented faintly with Prince Albert. "He must be alloy," you think and your awareness drifts to his trench coat, worn, softened, and fishy, a coat with a lalaby, just as the train arrives at a destination.

No, you would prefer another stop in a later chapter where the climate is affable and sleek. But most of the passengers are disembarking, and you did not choose to be in the story of the white dress. You did not choose the story of the marron whose bosom is like the prow of a ship and who is launched toward lunch at The Hotel Pierre, or even the story of the dog-on-a-leash, even though this is now your story: the story of the man-who-had-to-take-the-train and walk the dark road described hurriedly by someone sitting at the cafe so you could discover it, although you knew all along it would be there, you, who have been hovering above this page, holding the book in your hands, like God, reading.

—Lynn Emanuel