PLANNING ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE ST. LOUIS REGION

1951
The record of accomplishments in metropolitan planning in the St. Louis area is not as significant as that in city planning or in county planning. The City of St. Louis is a recognized example of the benefits of city planning with numerous planning accomplishments that are the result of consistent planning activities for more than 30 years. County planning in St. Louis County is more than ten years old. In contrast to these, there are no real accomplishments in metropolitan planning at the present time.

Before 1900 more than 68 percent of the population of the metropolitan district was found in the City of St. Louis. In 1920 64 percent of the population was still in the central city. After 1920, however, the metropolitan community experienced quite rapid growth particularly in the decades 1920-30 and 1940-50. This rapid growth, plus the common use of the automobile, completely changed the character of the metropolitan district. A much greater area was made susceptible to urbanization by the automobile and the urban community spread out into two states and the six surrounding counties. At the present time only 49 percent of the total
metropolitan population is found in the City of St. Louis and the metropolitan district contains 171 municipalities.

However, the metropolitan area is really just one big city. The natural unity of this area is self-evident to the individual residing here. He may cross county lines and city lines many times a day without knowing the lines are there. Unity is also evident from the air. The air traveler sees one big city extending far into the country in every direction. The many parts of this metropolitan area are interrelated and interdependent, and as this large community continues to grow, these many interrelationships and this basic unit of development will become far more evident and far more important.

Civic leaders have been aware for some time that this metropolitan area, this city grown large, requires unified planning and a unified development, if the important needs for physical improvements are to be filled and if those living and working conditions requisite to the "abundant life" for the people of the area are to be provided. During the 1930's the St. Louis Regional Planning Commission was formed. With the assistance of the National Resources Planning Board a report was made pointing out metropolitan problems and the need for metropolitan planning. This commission was succeeded by a citizens' group known as the "Metropolitan Plan Association". As a result of many years of investigation, promotion and hard work, this association succeeded in establishing the Bi-State Development Agency which became an official governmental agency on September 20, 1949.
The Bi-State Development Agency was established by an inter-state compact or treaty between the states of Missouri and Illinois, which has now been approved by Congress. This compact pledges the two states to "faithful cooperation in the future planning and development" of the Missouri-Illinois Metropolitan District, "holding in high trust for the benefit of the people and of the nation the special blessings and natural advantages thereof".

The compact creates a district to be known as the "Missouri-Illinois Metropolitan District" consisting of the City of St. Louis and the Counties of St. Charles, Jefferson and St. Louis in Missouri and the Counties of Madison, St. Clair and Monroe in Illinois. It is administered by a Board of ten commissioners, five appointed by the Governor of each state.

Under the compact the Agency has two types of functions:

1. It is empowered to make plans for submission to the local communities and the federal and state agencies for the coordination of land use, streets, highways, terminals, water supply, sewage and drainage facilities, park and recreation areas and other matters in which coordinated action will be generally beneficial.

2. It is empowered to plan, construct, maintain and operate bridges, tunnels, airports and terminal facilities.

The Bi-State Development Agency is not a super state. It has no taxing powers and is prohibited from taking any action which will affect the finances of any local governmental subdivision in the area. The agency can charge and collect fees for the use of facilities that it may own, issue revenue bonds upon the sums received from the use of these facilities, and may receive contributions that may be appropriated by municipalities, counties,
states or other agencies.

One of the first tasks of this agency has been to make an investigation of the present status of planning in the area and of the present needs for both planning and physical improvements so that it may determine the program that it should follow in order to make the maximum contribution to the development of the metropolitan community.

This survey was completed a month ago. It revealed that the metropolitan area was the 9th largest in the United States from the standpoint of employment, industrial activity, retail trade and family income. The present population of the metropolitan district is approximately one and three-quarter million persons and can be expected to increase to two million persons in the next 20 years. Of the 3,600 square miles in the metropolitan district 75 percent is being farmed, 18 percent is vacant, and only 7 percent is in urban use. This study indicated that the population of the area was decentralizing rapidly, retail establishments were also showing a definite trend to move to outlying locations, but that industry in general was continuing to concentrate in central areas, particularly in the City of St. Louis, with only a limited tendency to decentralize. It is quite evident, however, that even the limited decentralization of commerce and industry to date has made all parts of this metropolitan district susceptible to urban development and made it necessary to plan the entire area (and exercise a considerable measure of land use control over the entire area) if a satisfactory community was to result.

A major problem in the development of the metropolitan district is created by the chaotic sprawl of residential areas over the
countryside. These are developing in a most "hit or miss" fashion with large intervening vacant areas creating serious complications in the provision of public services and facilities. Furthermore, satisfactory residential neighborhoods, as we have come to know them, are not being developed.

It is not likely that the future population of 2 million persons will require more than 375 square miles of urban development, approximately ten percent of the area of the district. In a large measure the future welfare of the metropolitan district hinges on the precise location of this 375 square miles and of the various urban land uses that comprise it. In this connection it would seem desirable to bring about a greater dispersal of industry both in order to reduce travel time between home and work and as a protective measure against atomic attack. In such a dispersal plants should be located so that satellite communities separated from the main area of urbanization by wide strips of farm land would be developed. These satellite cities should include both existing communities and complete new towns.

The study of the Bi-State Agency revealed serious inadequacies in physical improvements and inadequacies in planning for the future of the metropolitan area. Only one of the six counties has a Planning Commission and only 17 of the 171 municipalities have prepared comprehensive plans. Only one county has a zoning ordinance and only 63 of the 171 cities have a zoning ordinance. Furthermore, such plans as have been made have necessarily been prepared in the absence of studies made on an overall metropolitan basis and possess inadequacies resulting from a necessarily limited point of view.
Needs for physical improvements include additional streets and highways, (particularly expressways), better and more unified mass transportation facilities, and improved freight terminals, and a metropolitan airport system. Only one-fifth the required acreage for neighborhood parks and only one-half the needed acreage for large parks has been provided. We have no metropolitan park system and no parkways in spite of the unusually fine natural opportunities for such developments. Drainage and sanitary sewerage improvements are badly needed. In St. Louis County, the most rapidly growing part of the area, two-fifths of the population lives in areas needing trunk sanitary sewers.

The most pressing need is a comprehensive plan for the metropolitan district. This should be developed by the Bi-State Agency and should be similar to the New York Regional Plan. In addition the development agency should be responsible for the airports, the bridges over the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, a major barge terminal on the Mississippi, and possibly several other freight and passenger terminals.

The Bi-State Development Agency operates with a small staff of three persons and has a policy of carrying out its work, insofar as possible, by the use of outside consultants. In addition to preparing the overall investigation of the present status of the district previously referred to, the agency is in the process of developing a major river terminal at the Granite City Harbor. It is sponsoring a highway and expressway survey in cooperation with the Bureau of Public Roads. It has prepared an investigation of the sewer problems in St. Louis County and is conducting a
sanitation survey of the Mississippi River. Investigations of
the possibility of acquiring and operating various bridges over
the Mississippi River have been made.

The Agency has made good progress in its slightly more than
one year of existence. It represents a beginning, a start, toward
a solution to our metropolitan problems.