



Speech by Rip Rapson:

Forward-Leaning Regionalism

April 12, 2018

Address to the annual meeting of the Centralina Council on Governments in Charlotte, North Carolina.

It is a peculiar form of madness that would lead one to presume to be able to talk to this group about issues you know so well.

It brings to mind the story about the late, great jazz drummer Art Blakey. It seems Blakey is driving the back-roads of Louisiana to a performance and he gets stuck behind a funeral procession and can't get by until the service is over. So, he gets out of his car and saunters over. Eventually the preacher asks if anyone has anything to say about the deceased. Nothing, just a long, awkward silence. Finally, Blakey jumps in and says, "Well, if no one wants to speak about the departed, I'd like to say a few words about jazz."

In that light, I'd like this afternoon to say a few words about my version of jazz – some reflections on our experiences in Detroit and how that might be relevant to you.

I. Lessons from the Detroit Experience

A Brief Tour of Detroit's Emerging Recovery

Detroit. Perhaps no other place evokes such powerful negative imagery: of deep and corrosive cycles of financial mismanagement, intense racial polarization and economic segregation, massive blight and abandonment, and paralyzing political dysfunction.

But I'd ask you to suspend your preconceptions for just a few moments. I want to suggest that the path Detroit has traveled over the last decade has recast its trajectory in remarkable, almost unimaginable ways, carrying powerful lessons for other American cities.

For the last 100 years, the city's identity has been synonymous with the automobile industry, which stretched *vertically* from the behemoths of General Motors, Chrysler, and Ford to the smallest car dealerships, and *horizontally* across a seemingly infinite supply chain – plastics, glass, rubber, computers, design, fabrication, and on and on.

But the auto monoculture that so totally dominated the Southeast Michigan economy has slowly and inexorably declined over the last 30 years, redefining the region in unimaginable ways:

- Shedding 300,000-400,000 manufacturing jobs and vacating hulking industrial plants.
- Draining investment from the core city and triggering the flight of black and white middle class families alike to the outer edges of the region, blighting the neighborhood landscape with 100,000 abandoned residential and commercial structures in Dresden-like scenes of devastation.

- Eviscerating the tax base, leading to the under-resourcing and politicizing of essential public services, including safety, public education, parks and transportation.

The velocity of this death spiral was accelerated in 2008 and 2009, when Detroit was drawn into the vortex of a storm of unimaginable proportions and severity. Its already fragile economy was knocked to its knees by the Great Recession. Its weak housing market destabilized by the foreclosure crisis. Its major employers pummeled by auto industry bankruptcies. Its political stability imploded by a corruption scandal that landed a charismatic, popular mayor and scores of his co-conspirators in jail.

And yet, it took the city's declaration of bankruptcy in 2013 for Detroit to realize that the death spiral might, in fact, lead to irreversible municipal collapse. The city's debt was estimated at \$18 billion, and it was projected that within 10 years, some two-thirds of the city's budget would be consumed by the payment of retiree benefits.

It was as if we were watching our obituary play out on the national stage.

But something way down deep kicked in. Please forgive the cliché, but Detroit began to draw on an unusually deep mother lode of resilience.

Maybe that resilience grew from the city's great fire of 1805, when Detroiters came together to rebuild their homes and businesses, birthing their motto: "We hope for better things; it shall rise from the ashes." It was an act of civic defiance against the destructive power of nature and humanity – a marker of collective resolve.

The question 200 years later was whether the city still possessed that resolve – whether it had the imagination, courage, skill and discipline to extract from a challenge of the magnitude of the bankruptcy the hidden opportunity for equally momentous change and potential transformation.

The answer was – and is – yes. We emerged from bankruptcy consensually and in light speed – a year.

It freed us to get back to the work of rebuilding a stable tax base, returning to well-managed municipal services, and reinvesting in the building blocks of a high quality of life. Among other things:

- We've transformed our cement-siloed, industrially abused riverfront into the city's front porch by creating the Detroit RiverWalk, which draws millions of visitors to the water each year.
- We've attracted some \$7 billion in private market investments back to the central city.
- We've launched a light-rail line along our main commercial corridor, taking the first step toward an integrated regional mass transit system.
- We've crafted a robust entrepreneurial ecology, birthing thousands of restaurants, technology firms, urban farms, gallery spaces and quality of life businesses throughout the city.
- We've developed a comprehensive landuse plan to guide the repurposing of the city's under-utilized physical, residential and economic assets.
- We've birthed a very different narrative of Detroit as a muscular, edgy center of creativity, technological innovation, and arts and cultural vibrancy.
- We've marshalled investments from the public, private and philanthropic sectors to support the renewal of our neighborhoods, including housing stabilization, commercial corridor redevelopment and early childhood development.

The work yet to be done is, of course, profoundly sobering and difficult. But I wanted to fill in the space created by the suspension of preconception to which you graciously agreed a moment ago.

And I also wanted to suggest three lessons that may have application to other places.

Lesson 1: The Primacy of Local Action

First, our work in Detroit casts in bright relief that it is at the local level that our nation will unearth and surface the preconditions for innovation in building equitable civic life.

It has been a long-standing article of faith among urbanists that the federal government is the prime mover in shaping metropolitan life. That script has flipped. As former Brookings Institution scholar Bruce Katz said to the *Charlotte Magazine* recently: “The feds are mostly a health insurance company with an army. And the states are primarily hostile and captured by partisanship and ideological polarization. So, this is it. This is the pragmatic level.”¹

This is not to deny that we in Detroit had enormous help from the Obama administration. But, at the end of the day, our 10-year return from the dead was driven in greatest measure by localism. And that only makes sense when one is reminded:

- That it is cities and regions that present the requisite density of activities, skills, and ideas to serendipitously or intentionally circulate, ricochet, recombine, and catalyze, creating integrated networks and diverse subcultures that are conducive to dismantling tired and unproductive approaches in favor of the new or imaginatively recycled.²
- That it is at the local level that transactional alliances morph over time into enduring networks of trust and mutual support, thereby layering through successive generations an accretion of shared history, accomplishment, norms and aspirations that crystalize into civic culture.
- That it is at the city and regional scale that it is still possible to concoct a partial antidote to the increasingly ideological and ineffective uniformity of federal policy and regulatory regimes.³
- And that it is at the local level that people can witness and feel the benefits of investing for the future, enabling them to forge a civic agenda that defines what the community is trying to achieve and how best to achieve it.

In the words of the Nobel laureate Bob Dylan: “You don’t need a weather man/To know the way the wind blows.” And it is blowing toward our local communities.

Lesson 2: The Emergence of Distributive Leadership

The second take-away is that municipal problem-solving capacities are increasingly characterized less by a “command and control” regimen emanating from City Hall and more by a highly distributed leadership network comprising the philanthropic, private, civic and public sectors.

Until the Great Recession, Detroit’s civic leadership was emblematically traditional. A strong mayor system, honed by 20 years of Coleman Young’s formidable, but rigid, exercise of power. A corporate community dominated by the centralized decision-making impulses of the automobile industry. An isolated and inward-looking philanthropic community rarely inserting itself into the thorny issues of the day.

But with Detroit’s world turned upside-down, each of the sectors recalibrated its role and responsibilities. They recognized that, in the face of scarce resources and existential challenges, shared problem-solving had to be the order of the day. Decision-by-decision, investment-by-investment, we evolved a commitment to reverse-engineering – the public, private and philanthropic sectors working

¹See Greg Lacour, Interview with Bruce Katz discussing his and Jeremy Nowak’s book, *The New Localism: How Cities Can Thrive in the Age of Populism*. “The Way Ahead for Charlotte,” *Charlotte Magazine*, November 2017. <http://www.charlottemagazine.com/Charlotte-Magazine/November-2017/The-Way-Ahead-for-Charlotteand-Cities/>

²With thanks to Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come From* (Penguin Group, New York: 2010).

³See, e.g., Bruce Katz and Jeremy Nowak, *The New Localism: How Cities Can Thrive in the Age of Populism* (Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C.: 2017).

backward from the articulation of a challenge to determine who had the tools most suitable to playing what role, and in what proportion.⁴

Let me offer just one example among many.

Detroit's economic monoculture was a century in the making, as the autos telegraphed precisely stipulated production requirements into every nook and cranny of their vast supply chain. The result was a strikingly thin membrane of entrepreneurship.

Kresge, together with nine other foundations, accordingly assembled a \$130 million fund to create the underpinnings of an entrepreneurial infrastructure: back-office supports, mentoring and networking opportunities, technical assistance, early stage capital, affordable space, and many others.

Over the next five years, this set in motion a flywheel of neighborhood-based small business formation and growth.

JP Morgan Chase soon joined the effort, making tens of millions of dollars available to community lending organizations. The mayor's office followed, creating something called Motor City Match, which paired start-ups with available property, construction resources, business advising services, and early stage capital.

I noted earlier the result: restaurants, tech firms, service businesses, maker spaces, urban farms, and arts activity radiating throughout the city. They are reweaving the city's fabric by pumping new capital into neighborhoods, activating street life, reclaiming underutilized land, and serving as a magnet for young people eager to make their mark.

The importance of this distributive model of problem-solving is not unique to Detroit. To call again on Bruce Katz: "In a bottom-up world," Bruce observed, "where you're actually responsible for solving problems and financing the solutions, the institutions will change. They'll have to. We can't do it with our current institutions. We have to create new ones or repurpose old ones."⁵

Lesson 3: The Imperative of Inclusive Growth

The third lesson – and development to watch – is that Detroit is bending every energy to ensure that the benefits of its recovery are shared by all residents.

Detroit's renaissance will not be realized unless its recovery is inclusive. As in Charlotte, we witness daily the vastly disproportionate impact of continuing income and opportunity disparities on those who stand on the far margins of political power, who feel the consequences of structural inequality, and who are denied full participation in the economic mainstream. They start with fewer resources, operate with fewer resources, accumulate fewer resources, and must swim against the tide of public understanding and appreciation.

How to crack the code of realizing economic growth that benefits the many, rather than the few, is something that has eluded every major metropolitan area in America. People's ZIP codes and race continue to dictate life outcomes – their health, safety, housing security, and movement up the social and economic ladder.⁶

Detroit is trying to reconstruct that reality through a complex inter-braiding of strategies:

- Drawing on multi-sector investment platforms to redirect capital to affordable housing, small-business development and public infrastructure.
- Ensuring that those who know their neighborhood the best have full agency in decision-making processes that reshape their communities.

⁴Bruce Katz and Jeremy Nowak observe: "We are schooled from an early age to think about hierarchical structures, vertical agencies and the execution of hard, formal power. The excessive focus on government rather than governance means that we wrongly equate urban problem solving with city governments in isolation from other civic and market actors.

A focus on networks, by contrast, compels us to turn the world on its side and explore horizontal relationships across a broad array of institutions and sectors. It forces us to reevaluate the nature of power, emphasizing the soft power of convening and cajoling, and how it is deployed within and across organizations." Bruce Katz & Jeremy Nowak, "Seeing Networks Everywhere." April 4, 2018 newsletter. Copyright 2018 by Bruce Katz and Jeremy Nowak.

⁵Lacour Interview with Bruce Katz, *op. cit.*

⁶See generally Truehaft, Sarah, "All-in-Cities: Strategies to Build an Equitable Economy from the Ground Up." PolicyLink 2016. http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/AIC_2016-update_WebOnly.pdf

- Building job readiness and training programs to equip residents for 21st century jobs.
- Creating opportunity-rich neighborhoods through the availability of fresh food, access to technology, early childhood development opportunities, open space and recreational centers, high quality out-of-school-time programs, and other essential civic building blocks.

And importantly, the administration of Mayor Mike Duggan – a white man in a city that is 80 percent African-American and 10 percent Hispanic – has systematically interrogated municipal policies and practices for the kind of racial and ethnic biases that impede progress toward full participation in the economic mainstream.⁷

So, keep an eye on this space.

That’s Detroit. What about Charlotte?

II. Charlotte’s Progress

A Region of Extraordinary Possibility

From the perch of an outside observer, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region has built and stewarded a package of qualities that would be the envy of any region in the country – despite what Amazon might believe:

- Your natural environment is spectacularly beautiful, and your powerful appeal to millennials really annoying to other cities.
- You’ve made smart long-term investments in public infrastructure – from museums to stadia to public spaces to light rail lines – although how a man-made whitewater river and a car-racing hall of fame slipped in is beyond me.
- Your higher education institutions seem laser-focused on credentialing a technologically sophisticated next-generation workforce.
- You’ve emerged as a significant immigrant gateway. I was stunned to learn that 33 of the state’s 100 counties would have had net negative population growth over the last decade absent immigrants.
- And even your craft-brew scene, with its breweries, pubs, and taverns, is breeding resentment in places like Milwaukee, who thought they had a corner on that market.

But yours is also a region of contrasts.

Although the region’s unemployment is the lowest it’s been for a decade, the job loss in manufacturing and textiles has been severe, with the nearly 90,000 jobs lost in the Great Recession slow to return and the imperative of economic diversification continuing to be a challenge.

And even though the region’s individual municipalities are well-managed and present high potential for growth, persistent patterns of racial segregation and ongoing struggles with upward intergenerational economic mobility threaten to be an invidious drag on the region’s aspirations to provide inclusive opportunity for all its citizens.⁸

⁷The national research and policy organization PolicyLink has framed the challenge aptly:

Success in cities and the nation depends on the ability of people of color – who are the emerging majority – to be the leaders, innovators, workers, entrepreneurs, and creative problem solvers who can produce widespread prosperity for generations.

Id.

⁸In a 2014 study by Raj Chetty, Charlotte was 50th among the 50 largest American cities in upward economic mobility.

Chetty, Raj, Hendren, Nathaniel, Kline, Patrick, and Saez, Emmanuel. “Where is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the U.S.” <http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/assets/documents/Geography%20Executive%20Summary%20and%20Memo%20January%202014.pdf>

An Inflection Point for Shared Prosperity: *The Leading on Opportunity Plan*

The very good news is that you know this and are poised at a powerful inflection point to do something about it. Charlotte-Mecklenburg is, in fact, one of a very few regions that is explicitly naming these challenges and evidencing a clear intent to confront them.

The Leading on Opportunity Plan, your comprehensive framework to close racial gaps, reduce segregation, promote economic mobility, and pursue shared prosperity, is a remarkable blueprint.⁹ Its focus on child and family stability, early care and education, and college and career readiness sends a powerful message about the necessity of elevating social capital as part of a regional economic development strategy.

The Role of the Centralina Council on Governments

The Leading on Opportunity Plan would be progress enough in most communities in America. That Centralina has separately engaged on so many other fronts is even more impressive.

Perhaps foremost is your CONNECT our Future framework. How any organization in its right mind would consider creating consensus across two states and fourteen counties is beyond me. But CCOG did it.

And you did it the hard way. By engaging nearly 8,500 community residents over three years, drawing on some 60 community growth workshops, working across the public, private and nonprofit sectors, and having it affirmed by a consortium of almost 100 members.

But a plan is only a plan until it is catapulted into tangible action. That you have catapulted in multiple dimensions is a powerful distinguisher from so many other regions of our country.

I'm struck, in particular, that you've made so much progress on transit – despite CCOG not formally housing the region's authority for transportation planning:

- A case in point is the Greater Charlotte Regional Freight Mobility Plan, which brought together six transportation planning organizations, two state Departments of Transportation, private firms, and federal agencies to map from a mobility, economic development, and landuse perspective how goods and materials move through the region by truck, train, or plane.
- Similarly, your Regional Transit Engagement Series, calling on some twenty forums, thirty stakeholder meetings, and a public survey, has built the kind of regional relationships and shared understandings that bode well for the success of your regional transit summit next month.

This work underscores the continuing challenge of bridging between the thoughtful housing, transportation, water and air quality, public space, and community engagement strategies contained in CONNECT and the cluster of racial disparity challenges identified in the Leading on Opportunity plan.

So, let me turn to some observations about how that might be done – to what the next generation of regionalism might look like in Centralina.

III. The Case for Next-Generation Regionalism in Charlotte

From A Patchwork to a Web

The region has moved in and out of various attempts to define why regionalism is needed and how it might best be accomplished. But everything you're doing suggests to me that Centralina is poised at the edge of a very different construct of regionalism.

You are increasingly reaching escape velocity from a traditionally fashioned view of regional cooperation that emphasizes rigidly

⁹*Leading on Opportunity*. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force, 2017: <https://leadingonopportunity.org/>.

demarcated, inwardly focused, hermetically sealed centers of housing, commerce, recreation and service. In its place, you seem inclined toward a regional perspective more akin to a web: an intricately interwoven network of interdependent, multifaceted and mutually reinforcing nodes.

And yet, being inclined is not the same as ushering in the change you seek. That will require even higher degrees of intentionality and commitment than has been required thus far.

The physicist Neils Bohr once remarked: “Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future.” But let me nevertheless suggest three milestones that may lie along a future path.

1. Creating Buy-In for Networked Action

The first is cultivating a more broad-based community of support.

The region’s business and civic leadership has begun forming the indispensable neural network that:

- Creates virtual proximity, density and connectivity across a vast geography.
- Eases the flow of information.
- Facilitates the convergence of municipal interests and trusted relationships.
- Identifies a common toolbox – all the critical building blocks necessary to assemble an architecture of shared vision and action.

There seems little question that this network will foster a heightened capacity to act in concert on issues that have been stubbornly resistant to change: workforce housing; farmland and open space preservation; public transit; and many others.

But the network will remain tentative and fragile absent widespread public understanding of, and support for, what you seek to accomplish. Your efforts to engage the broader public thus far have been admirable. They are, however, only a start.

We all face the challenge of how to construct and operate platforms of public education and information-sharing that enlist our citizens and elected decision-makers in unpacking and reassembling complex, gnarly issues. The challenge is doubly acute in an era in which people take in only the information they want, when they want it, in the form they want it, on the technological platform they want it.

We – you – will have to struggle hard to figure out just how this decentralized information matrix can contribute to our efforts to engage citizens in the business of regional growth and opportunity. At the very least, the situation suggests, for the Wrinkle in Time devotees among you, a 21st-century version of the tesseract: a foreshortening of the time it takes to travel between two points. Stated slightly differently, a way to reduce the intervals between the expression of ideas and their implementation

We’ll need a mediating machinery to ensure that residents believe they’ve been heard and that something will come from it. That will likely entail, if truth be told, a bit of chaos, a heavy dose of unpredictability and some degree of discomfort. But this region is as well positioned as any to wade in.

2. Optimizing the Balance Between the Center and the Nodes

The second quality of the new regionalism might be the rebalancing of the relationship between the center and the nodes.

Even as the highly self-sufficient, independent cities on Charlotte’s shoulder become more economically diversified, stable, and vibrant, the center remains the center of finance, of arts and culture, of entertainment, of millennial attraction, of transportation. This region – quite unlike any number of others – has been consummately skillful in comprehending that the vitality of the center contributes to – and is fed by – the vitality of all the nodes of the regional web.

But that is a balance of energies that will need to be carefully tended.

The pull-in/centripetal energy will grow as millennials continue to flock to Charlotte. College-educated 25-35 year-olds are more than twice as likely as any other American demographic to live within a three-mile radius of a central business district. Because they are waiting longer before getting married and having children, they are staying put longer. And they’re increasingly being followed

by their empty-nester parents who no longer need all those rooms and that lawn to mow.¹⁰

Charlotte is, moreover, emblematic of cities returning to their historic role as employment centers. Charlotte is in the front-ranks of any national survey of economic growth potential – whether grounded in the financial, tech, entertainment, or insurance sectors.¹¹

The push-out/centrifugal energy will also grow as the nodes outside of Charlotte exert an even more powerful magnetic field. Think Davidson, capitalizing on its lake and college. Or Cornelius or Huntersville, attracting residents to world-class recreational and cultural amenities. Or Harrisburg, capitalizing on its vibrant town center. And so many more. Each carving a distinctive niche in the regional economy, sociology, and psychology.

Hence, the web. Growing, reshaping, continually rebalancing. All of the parts essential to the whole.

The question is how opportunity across racial, demographic, and economic lines will affect, and be affected by, that rebalancing. There is no tougher question. But answering it will be essential to your future.¹² Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was right: “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”¹³

3. Broadening the Aperture of Transportation Planning and Execution

A third quality of the next-generation regionalism might be a wider aperture for transportation planning and practice.

In the new regionalism, public transportation should be as much about the enhancement of the quality of a place as it is about engineering efficiencies and ease of vehicular travel.

It’s easy to take attractive, vibrant places for granted. But we shouldn’t. They reflect the conscious and unconscious decisions we make in drawing up the map and rules for civic life: the scale, the design, the social norms and the patterns of movement that define how people engage with one another; how they build networks of mutual support; how they encourage or discourage social and economic opportunity.¹⁴

This region has been expert in its placemaking. You’ve extended beyond simply enhancing the physical attributes of your cities and towns. Town by town, you’ve assembled an alchemy of cultural, social, visual and environmental qualities that imbue that place with meaning and significance. Residents form a bond with such places, fortifying their desire to stay committed, to invest, to build a shared future there.¹⁵

Transportation is an underappreciated asset in this kind of placemaking. But the examples of transportation shape-shifting into a potent force for placemaking are multiplying:

- Think about streets becoming destinations in and of themselves – like 14th Street in Denver.
- Or about pedestrian corridors that redefine the public realm – like the Nicollet Mall in Minneapolis or New York City’s High Line.
- Or about rail-to-trail reclamations – like Atlanta’s Beltline or Detroit’s Dequindre Cut.
- Or about the deconstruction of highways to liberate the street – as was done in Milwaukee and San Francisco.

To play this role, transportation planning and execution has had to rethink how it interweaves with other public systems. Although public agencies may organize vertically into silos of expertise – housing, economic development, health, transportation – people live horizontally. A community member’s livelihood may depend on the convenience of travel between her home and her workplace. Her

¹⁰With thanks to Carol Coletta, Kresge Senior Fellow, for raising these themes in her remarks to the Downtown Dallas, Inc. meeting on March 5, 2018.

¹¹See, e.g., Charlotte Chamber, “Charlotte Ranks No. 2 in U.S. for Economic Growth Potential and Among Top 10 for Startups,” July 25, 2017.

<https://charlottechamber.com/news/2017/07/25/economic-development-news/charlotte-ranks-no.-2-in-u.s.-for-economic-growth-potential-and-among-top-10-for-startups/>

¹²In the Charlotte stop on his recent book tour for *The New Localism*, Bruce Katz suggested one way this would play out: “There are things that the rural periphery should do [for example] – around logistics . . . manufacturing and production, energy sourcing, food-to-market – that the core city can’t do. These linkages are going to be strengthened.” Greg Lacour, Interview with Bruce Katz, “The Way Ahead for Charlotte,” *Charlotte Magazine*, November 2017.

<http://www.charlottemagazine.com/Charlotte-Magazine/November-2017/The-Way-Ahead-for-Charlotteand-Cities/>

¹³Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” August 1963. https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter_Birmingham_Jail.pdf.

¹⁴See, e.g., Solnit, Rebecca, *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics*, p.9 (University of California Press, Berkeley: 2007).

¹⁵McMahon, Edward, “The Place Making Dividend.” *Planning Commissioners Journal*, No. 80, page 16 (Fall 2010).

health may be compromised by the proximity of truck traffic routes servicing a railyard. Her family's stability may be improved by her access to affordable, high-quality community mental healthcare.

It's not that transit is ignoring these interconnections, it's just that it is difficult to do. Centralina has broken important ground on this front, recognizing that transportation systems not only connect individuals to opportunities, but fashion the operating code of neighborhoods, cities and regions as a whole – whether as a catalyst for economic development, a magnet for the attraction and retention of talent, or a corrective to the job sprawl that spawns the mismatch between where people live and where they work.

But because transit is so completely embedded in the ebb and flow of daily life, the decisions that shape it should increasingly reflect the voice of community stakeholders – residents, businesses, places of worship, and countless others. That's where things get even more difficult.

If one's frame of reference is regional competitiveness, it's easy to conceive of the primary transit constituency as the business community. If that frame is urban vitality, it's equally easy to focus on the hipster, millennial cohort. And if the frame is relieving congestion, it's natural to zero in on suburban homeowners who make most of the cross-regional trips.

But if frame is also going to embrace equitable regional opportunity, it has to account the interests of people with low-incomes, a population disproportionately dependent on transit and for whom transit projects can have both salutary and deleterious impacts. It has to equip those residents with the requisite tools to push their needs, hopes, and sensibilities onto the table

Transit has had a checkered history on this front – too frequently marginalizing, or outright harming, low-income communities. The examples are legion and painful: from freeways all across America that sundered African-American neighborhoods to Robert Moses' notorious construction of the overpasses along the Long Island Expressway so low as to prevent buses from reaching amenities like Jones Beach.

There is every reason to believe that this history doesn't have to be our future:

- That transit planning can contribute to the kind of inclusive, balanced growth to which regions like yours aspire.
- That it holds the potential to be a bridging tool, not a wedging device.
- That it has the ability to stitch together distinct places, diverse communities of people, and different economic, cultural, social, and historical patrimonies.¹⁶

All of those things are possible here.

Conclusion

Guiding the future stability, growth and prosperity of a region requires people thinking and acting toward a common purpose at every horizon. This greater vision is elegantly captured in what Charlotte, and Centralina, seek to do.

The people in this audience will be instrumental in how you will usher in and shape that vision. Your compass seems to be pointing away from the safe and secure moorings of the status quo toward a new constellation of possibilities. That holds the promise of becoming powerful, cutting-edge work. It is vital that you succeed. The rest of the nation is watching.

So, thank you for listening. Very best of luck. I hope you have a productive, provocative conference.

¹⁶A helpful tool in thinking about issues of equitable transit planning was recently released by the Greenlining Institute. *Mobility Equity Framework*. <http://greenlining.org/publications/2018/mobility-equity-framework/>.