



March 6, 2023

Dear Chair Dibble and Members, Senate Transportation Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on SF 1624-Dibble that requires the Metropolitan Council to be an elected body. The Association of Metropolitan Municipalities (Metro Cities), representing the shared interests of cities in the metropolitan region at the Legislature, Executive Branch and Metropolitan Council, respectfully opposes SF 1624.

Regional decisions and municipal implementation of regional requirements are closely intertwined. Metro Cities has periodically conducted studies with city officials to review the Council's governance, and these studies have resulted in consistent support for appointment of members by the Governor, staggered terms for members, more transparency in the selection process, and enhancing local official engagement in the selection process.

Metro Cities offers the following concerns with the proposed governance model in SF 1624:

- ❖ An elected Metropolitan Council would create, in effect, a 'mini legislature'. The Metropolitan Council was not created to hold broad legislative powers, but to address specific needs for regional systems and infrastructure that cannot be effectively provided by the Legislature or local governments. The Metropolitan Council's structure was designed to give it sufficient latitude to operate regionally, while limiting its powers and requiring it to remain accountable to state and local officials.
- ❖ An elected Metropolitan Council adds another layer of elected government -- one that could be susceptible to seeking expanded authorities currently under the purview of local governments.
- ❖ An elected Council would eliminate a structure that currently provides for consistent local official engagement across the scope of regional decision-making and diminish the ability of city officials to have equal seats at the table of regional decisions. The Transportation Advisory Board serves as one example of highly effective cooperation among a diverse set of constituencies that includes local elected officials, modal representatives, and citizens. This change would distance local officials and others from regional work and processes, which have worked effectively for decades.
- ❖ An elected and parochial structure could paralyze the Metropolitan Council in its ability to fulfill its core regional functions of managing orderly growth and the provision of regional scale infrastructure, which would result in significant consequences for citizens, businesses, and

workers in the region and hinder the ability of the metropolitan region to be economically competitive.

Metropolitan city officials have stressed the importance of addressing specific regional problems, as they arise, with specific solutions, rather than wholesale governance changes to a regional body responsible for a wide array of functions. City officials also recognize that regional systems, infrastructure, and services require highly regional rather than parochial approaches to be successful and for the benefits to be shared by residents and businesses across the metropolitan region.

A number of governance changes have been recommended in recent years by Metro Cities, the Citizens League, and a Governor's Blue-Ribbon Committee, all involving a cross-section of stakeholders. These various studies all considered an elected Metropolitan Council, but none recommended this regional governance model.

These studies did recommend similar governance changes that include appointment of Council members by the governor, staggered terms, as well as increasing transparency in the appointment process. These recommendations are considered by many to be changes that would improve the region's governance while avoiding potentially significant and unforeseen consequences for the provision of core regional services and functions.

I would be happy to provide further information and look forward to working with the committee as it considers this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,



Patricia Nauman
Executive Director