

Integrated Urban Governance  
The New York and Chicago Examples  
By Neal Peirce, Citiscope Project and  
Washington Post Writers Group

Integrated urban governance has been something of a stepchild in the United States. Through the 20th century the country had an expansive economy and relatively high standard of living. But from the 1940s onward it tilted its national policies to assist suburbs, not central cities. Other dragging anchors were deterioration of our city centers, urban population loss, and growth of slums with large minority populations.

There were exceptions to the rule, cities that prospered against the tide, especially from the late 1980s onward. New York, Chicago, Boston, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Portland are among the cities substantially stronger today than 20 years ago.

But only in the last few years have some cities begun to think through their governance, their infrastructure and economies, their physical environments, their relations to private industry on one hand and disadvantaged communities on the other, in what can be called truly comprehensive ways.

Let me talk about two clear leaders: New York and Chicago.

New York has been fortunate to have a future-oriented and goal-oriented business leader, Michael Bloomberg, as its mayor. Bloomberg asked his staff to figure out how his already densely packed city could accommodate the predicted 1 million new residents, and 750,000 jobs, by 2030.

The basic infrastructure was a critical problem: for example nearly 3,000 miles of roads, bridges, tunnels, and a majority of subway stations are in need of serious repair, along with power plants dating back to the 1920s – the power plants' emissions being a major factor in asthma hospitalizations rates twice the American average. And then carbon: because New York City

is something like an archipelago, sensitive to sea level rises, there was clear need for a campaign to convince the owners of buildings -- and buildings are the biggest single emitter of carbon -- to start energy retrofitting of their structures.

The business-oriented assessment made an environmentalist of the business tycoon Michael Bloomberg. On Earth Day 2007 he unveiled his "PlanNYC" for a "Greener, Greater New York" -- the most comprehensive plan for the 21st century any American city or state has formulated. It include putting all the city's road and transit lines in good condition for the first time ever. New or renovated power plants. Cleaning up contaminated brownfields. And in the process, creating space in the city, with a healthy environment, for a quarter million new housing units. And a human element, too: putting recreation space in close distance for each New York citizen, creating public spaces for every community, and opening 290 schoolyards as public playgrounds.

The implementation has not been 100 percent successful. Bloomberg wanted a system of "congestion pricing" for a major part of Manhattan. That meant tolls -- akin to the system in Singapore and Stockholm and London -- to be charged for any private vehicles entering during working hours. But Bloomberg needed approval from the state legislature, and the legislature succumbed to pressure from suburban interests who were opposed.

And indeed, while PlaNYC is a startling breakthrough for New York City proper, the huge surrounding jurisdictions, both in New York State and the neighboring states of Connecticut and New Jersey, have made only token moves toward its sustainability goals.

But the model still has amazing power behind it. A 15-member city advisory board, with a cross-section of top business, civic, labor, environmental and foundation leaders, played a role in shaping PlaNYC in the first instance. Now that group meets regularly to watch over the process, with working groups conferring frequently with city department leaders. The result is a constant conversation among leaders of often very independent

departments-- with the mayor watching. Since this connects agenda across all areas of city operations, it seems to me a model example of integrated urban governance.

In contrast to New York, Chicago has had a career political, Richard M. Daley in office -- indeed, for a record-breaking 21 years. Chicago's historic image was a grimy city of steel making and hog butchering, flavored by organized crime in the school of the famed Al Capone. Today its image, and reality, have changed dramatically. As opposed to his heavy-handed father, who ruled the city for many years before him, this Mayor Daley has reached out to a broad range of constituencies -- voters of all classes, blacks, Hispanics, young professionals, cause-oriented citizen groups -- and with very broad success.

And the policy focus has changed, dramatically too, starting I believe with Daley's passion to create a kind of new green alchemy -- meaning a green and inviting city not just along its beautiful lakefront, but deep back into much less affluent neighborhoods. He ordered planting of medians of flowers throughout the downtown, for example, but then extended those strips of color by 110 miles, deep into working class neighborhoods. He installed one of America's first green roofs atop City Hall, and today Chicago has 7 million square feet of green roofs -- most of any world city. Daley supported arts, culture, and a very fine public library system.

And in the process of all that, Daley began to transform Chicago into a city where people *want* to live -- including talented young professionals who could likely find good jobs in any city they chose. The Boeing Corporation was recruited from Seattle. Financial services thrived. The O'Hare Airport, promoted relentlessly by the mayor, gained global importance.

But that's hardly all. Daley inaugurated a climate action plan that's arguably the world's most advanced. Based on careful scientific research and broad community consensus-building. It features 452 steps cross-cutting major segments of Chicago's geography, economy and living patterns. And there's strong follow-through, including quarterly accountability meetings of

department heads. It's the sole American example we chose to feature in our inaugural edition of the Citiscope service.

But for integrated urban governance, consider the other measures Daley pushed in Chicago:

- + Tearing down some of the world's most fearful, crime-infested public, or social housing high-rise buildings -- constructed, ironically, under his father in the 1960s. Mixed-income, low-rise projects were substituted.

- + Placing the school's lagging public schools under direct control of the mayor, to raise learning standards.

- + Founding a Metropolitan Mayors Caucus. Chicago, like New York, has vast areas of suburban development, with hundreds of smaller cities and little towns, legally independent of the city. Relations had historically been very strained. Daley's solution: to form a Metropolitan Mayors Caucus. He sits as "one of equals" with 272 other mayors of his region. This is clearly not the same as integrated metropolitan governance -- far from it. As I heard Daley explain, "We have started with the low-hanging fruit," meaning the areas of easy agreement. But at least the possibility of metro-wide coherence has been significantly increased. It's a very important opening door. Denver and Philadelphia have since copied the model.

None of this means Mayor Daley's years have been perfect. Vestiges of his father's the old patronage machine, with clear political favoritism, continue. Daley has just announced his retirement. He will leave office with a big deficit -- a product of the recession. Chicago's problems of poverty, crime, are still real.

But for thinking through a broad agenda, and making an entire city government work hard to achieve it, it's one of America's best cases ever of integrated urban governance. And with the immense respect Daley has built up, an opportunity for American cities and their mayors, which have hardly been world leaders in thinking through sustainability issues, to adopt new

and more sensitive practices for this new century

Another problem is Americans too seldom looking beyond their own national borders to good examples. So let me add a concluding item. Mayor Daley has tried, in a nation that often just looks inward, selfishly assuming it's somehow the center of the universe, to be a world mayor. He forges ties with international cities; he checks for their ideas; he reads foreign newspapers daily; he holds an annual Chicago forum for global mayors. It's an outreach for learning and alliances -- vital for this century -- that no other American mayor has matched. My argument would be that outreach to world cities, looking for new ideas across the continents, needs to be a central, integral part of integrated urban management in our time.