A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF REGIONAL COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENT

IN EAST AND CENTRAL ALABAMA

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A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF REGIONAL COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENT IN EAST AND CENTRAL ALABAMA

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Shakeesha Washington, daughter of Kimberly Washington and the late Steven Davis, was born January 7, 1976, in Joliet, Illinois. Shakeesha graduated from Henninger High School in Syracuse, New York, in 1994. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from Stony Brook University in May of 2004. Shakeesha entered graduate school at Auburn University in August 2005 in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology.

THESIS ABSTRACT

A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF REGIONAL COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENT

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Councils of Governments (COGs) are governmental units designed to provide regional coordination among local governments and assistance in obtaining grants from state and federal agencies. COGs are made up of county and municipal governments led by elected or appointed officials. The focus of this thesis is on the Lee-Russell Council of Governments (Lee and Russell counties) and the South Central Alabama Development Commission (Bullock, Butler, Crenshaw, Lowndes, Pike and Macon counties). Based on personal interviews with past and present mayors, city councils members, council board directors, professional staff and others, this thesis examines how the relationships of the

councils and their constituents determine the benefits, and services the councils provide for the citizens under their jurisdictions, as well as barriers to such services.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The creation of Councils of Governments (COGs) in the 1950s gave the federal government an opportunity to outsource jobs and services as well as give more power to local governments over decisions that affect them directly (Grigsby 1996). Since their inception, COGs have been primarily planning organizations that have played a major role in the comprehensive planning of many urban areas. Their role as government organizations has not sparked the interest of many social or political science researchers. In the last 57 years there have been only a handful of dissertations done on COGs at various colleges and universities. Subjects range from historical accounts, to state to state comparisons of differences in operation, to analyses of their organizational capabilities.

COGs, like many organizations, have experienced highs and lows since their initial existence and have worked hard for the local municipalities to which they are assigned by the state legislature. According to the National Association of Regional Councils, COGs serve as multi-service entities “which consist of elected officials, and appointed citizens” (Lapping, Daniels, and Keller 1989). COGs differ from region to region and have a range of powers and duties that they assume in different parts of the United States. Regional Councils of Governments provide a variety of local services and programs funded by local, state, and federal governments. COGs deliver these services based on state and federal government guidelines. The nature of programs and services offered by a regional council reflects unique local problems and issues found in that region. COGs are primarily held accountable by local governments, while still being responsible to both state and federal government partners (NARC 2006).

This study done in Alabama focuses on Lee-Russell Council of Governments (LRCOG), which includes Lee and Russell counties in the east, and South Central Alabama Development Commission (SCADC), which includes Pike, Crenshaw, Macon, Montgomery, Bullock, Butler, and Lowndes counties. Though the regions are contiguous, they differ in many ways, including population rates, racial make-up, and income levels. Like in other states there are various names that Alabama's COGs assume, but their mission is the same: to build stronger communities by providing services and programs that will bridge the gaps between classes and races. Alabama and the South in general face unique challenges because historically they have been divided by race and class.

This is a qualitative, comparison study primarily focused on Lee, Russell, Bullock and Macon counties found in east-central Alabama. Lee and Russell counties are both considered metropolitan, whereas Macon and Bullock are non-metropolitan counties. Macon and Bullock counties are located in the state's Black Belt. Though Macon and Lee share a border, they are represented by two different regional councils that implement different strategies to provide services for their regions. This research will evaluate the effectiveness of the COGs with jurisdiction over Bullock, Lee, Macon, and Russell counties, primary focusing on public transportation, area aging services, and comprehensive planning.

Research Objectives

This study will address the following reach objectives:

Objectives:

1. Review literature on the formation of COGs and changes in their functions and resources over the years.
2. Examine the different approaches of two regional councils to securing public transportation, aging services, and planning for their communities.
3. Examine the relationship between the COGs staff and the local municipalities.

There are unspoken relationships between members of the board as well as events that occur that go unacknowledged or unnoticed. In Alabama, like many places, change is a hard thing to accept and is never easy. Complicated race relations in the area between the local municipalities and their citizens have been in existence since slavery. This research will shed light on each COG's overall performance. Benefits, disadvantages and barriers all taken into consideration can bring about more awareness of local citizens and more responsible local municipalities.

Why are Council of Governments Important?

"The Councils of Governments are advocates for local municipalities" (Kelley 1978). Throughout the years of their existence, their responsibilities have grown from basic planning into acting as social service agencies, while remaining clearinghouses for federal and state funds for local programs. Though they are responsible for their regions, COGs are also accountable to legislature, the federal government and state governors, and their concerns must reflect objectives of the whole state. Councils always have to take the whole state into consideration when addressing problems, which is challenging because solutions on a state level may not benefit locally, and vise versa.

COGs are staffed organizations guided by an executive board composed of elected and appointed officials. COGs have no direct power over local governments, but rather serve as advisors. They usually provide full-time planners and grant writers to small cities and towns that cannot afford them. Councils usually hire specialists that focus on the needs of particular regions; such specialists include city and land use planners, grant writers, financial analysts, technical and transportation specialists, and social workers (Kelley 1987). The councils of government cannot tell the local municipalities what to do, but instead provide them with information and alternatives.

COGs function as multi-county organizations that are the states' primary advocates for regionalism. They work hard to persuade local officials to look beyond traditional boundaries of city, town, and county, and examine the overall benefits of working collectively to provide services for their communities. The councils work on a contractual basis for various state and federal agencies, providing statistical information and helping to implement programs. Since councils are scattered throughout the state, they have access to local knowledge, and they are valuable to both state and federal governments. There are 12 COGs in the state of Alabama (Figure 1).

The councils help local municipalities gain access to federal funds, which are usually available to local municipalities, provided they have match money. Match money is the percentage of the total cost of a project that the local government is responsible for paying in order to gain access to the federal funds. The councils usually provide information about different federal grants that would enable local communities to get certain programs funded. The policy used to be that if local communities wanted to apply for federal funds outside the councils they faced a "great deal of bureaucratic red tape" (Kelley 1978:33). There was some resentment from state officials who wanted the decision-making to remain central to state control. Even though policies have changed, the federal government still wants information form the councils (Kelley 1978).

As mentioned above, councils' ability to serve local municipalities as clearinghouses is one of the main reasons they are important to local governments. Nevertheless, councils only draw funds for projects or programs that are approved by the governing board of elected and appointed officials. The governing board members are the decision-makers; they approve all policies and procedures. The council's board and the members' vision determine the council's ability to maximize its efforts, which could ultimately affect the council's ability to be effective and efficient.

This research will add to the limited amount of information about regional councils. Providing more information may prompt more interest in and awareness of councils so they can stop flying below the radar. The more citizens know about councils, the more input they can have in what issues are addressed by their local governments.

Research Setting

Macon and Lee counties were originally selected primarily because they were contiguous counties in two different COGs. One county (Lee) is metropolitan while the other (Russell) is not. Bullock and Russell were added because my observations, as well as my informants led me there. These four counties were also selected for my research because they are in close proximity to Auburn University. Personal interviews were chosen as the primary source of data to gain a more nuanced understanding of the issues.

The four study counties were convenient and roughly within an hour of Auburn. Even though there are volumes of information on other Black Belt counties, there is little research done within Bullock County. Researchers primarily focus on West Alabama's Black Belt region, which is larger in population and landscape than the south-central portion (Dyer 2007).

Lee County was the easiest location to gain access to potential informants because it required minimal travel, is home to Auburn University, and simply being a student carried weight in the community. Russell County is also under the Lee-Russell Council of Government (LRCOG) and its informants were open to discussion of officials' perspectives. The Russell County officials never appeared suspicious of my intentions, and were always open and ready to answer any question. Macon and Bullock counties are under the South Central Alabama Development Commission (SCADC) and located in the Black Belt, which made them interesting to study and see the differences in priorities and collective actions of each county. Bullock is primarily known for its bird dog hunting season and chicken farms, while Macon is the home of Tuskegee University, the site for many major African American accomplishments. Studying both counties was an opportunity to observe the difference between the Black Belt and other areas of Alabama.

Bullock County

Bullock County is located in the southeastern portion of Alabama, south of Macon County. The county was named after a Confederate colonel, Edward C. Bullock. The county was formed from portions of Pike, Macon, Barbour and Montgomery counties in 1866 by Alabama's Legislature. The land, like in much of the South, was seized from the original settlers the Creek Indians. The majority of Bullock County is rural, with the exception of Union Springs and Midway. In the center of Union Springs stands a statue of a bird dog, honoring those responsible for the town's reputation as the "Bird Dog Field Trial Capital of the World" (Union Springs, 2007). The County is surrounded by developed metropolitan areas including: Auburn-Opelika, Montgomery, and Columbus, Georgia, giving it access to opportunities to bring economic development to the region.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), Bullock was one of the least populated counties in Alabama at 11,714 residents. The county is predominantly African-American with a population of 73.1 percent African Americans. There are 13.2 percent of the residents over age 65 and more than half of those over 65 are disabled; 33.5 percent of families are living below the poverty level, a rate that is significantly higher than the nationwide percentage of 9.2. In 1999 the county's median household income was $23,990, which was lower than the national median income of $41,944. Residents spend an average of 26 minutes commuting to work, and of the 3,773 residents in the work force, 2,411 ride alone, 635 carpool, 173 people walk, and 58 find other means of getting around. There is no public transit or taxi service available to residents.

There are many factors that contribute to the decline of the region. On average 60.5 percent of the residents have high school diplomas, while only 7.7 percent have college degrees. The majority of the jobs are in manufacturing, education, health, social services and recreation (fishing and hunting). All things taken into account, the region is a victim of brain drain, where lack of educational and employment opportunities for the next generation leads to out migration.

Macon County

Macon County is located west of Lee and Russell counties and north of Bullock County. Macon, created December 18, 1832, was named after a North Carolina Senator, Nathaniel Macon. The county sits off Interstate 85 and between U.S. highways 29 and 80, and is within a thirty minute drive from Auburn-Opelika and Montgomery. Macon is home to Tuskegee University (formerly Tuskegee Institute), where major African American achievements were accomplished.

Tuskegee Institute was founded by Booker T. Washington, who introduced the term "Black Belt" in his 1901 autobiography "Up from Slavery":

> *The term was first used to designate a part of the country which was distinguished by the colour of the soil. The part of the country possessing this thick, dark, and naturally rich soil was, of course, the part of the South where the slaves were most profitable, and consequently they were taken there in the largest numbers. Later and especially since the war, the term seems to be used wholly in a political sense—that is, to designate the counties where the black people outnumber the white (Washington 1901:108).*

Washington's mission for the Institute was to educate the newly freed slaves and prepare them for a life of self-sufficiency. Tuskegee is the birthplace of civil rights activist Rosa Parks, where the infamous Syphilis Study was conducted, and where George Washington Carver flourished with his innovative research in southern farming methods, crops and peanuts. The city of Tuskegee and Tuskegee Institute were home to the first squadron of African American pilots in the U.S. military, known as the Tuskegee Airmen.

Macon’s population of 24,105 makes it one of the least populated counties in Alabama. Macon has one of the highest percentages of African American residents in Alabama at 84.6 percent. The elderly population makes up 14 percent, with 60 percent of them considered disabled. Employed residents travel an average of 25 minutes to work. A 6.1 percent unemployment rate is higher than the national average. The majority of the workforce is employed in education, health, social service agencies, and manufacturing plants, earning a median household income of $21,180.

Lee County

Lee County is located in east Alabama, north of Macon and Russell counties along the Georgia border. Lee County is home to sister metropolitan Auburn and Opelika cities, and to a host of many rural and small towns, most within an hour’s drive of Montgomery and Columbus, Georgia, giving residents access to more growth and development. The county was formed on December 5, 1866, through legislative action from portions of Russell, Macon, Chambers, and Tallapoosa counties. The land was originally inhabited by the Cherokee Indians. The county was named after General Robert E. Lee of the Confederate Army. Historically, the county was home to textile mills and farmers, many of whom migrated from Georgia.

Auburn and Opelika are economically developed cities. Auburn has been an educational hub of Alabama since the mid-1800s when Auburn University was first established as East Alabama Male College. Even then locals realized that quality education would bring more successful residents to the area. Opelika focused its attention on the textiles mills, but after the loss of many mills the city focused its attention toward broader economic development. Opelika is considered a town of blue-collar workers, and

Auburn as home to many white collar residents. Between the two cities there are a quality health facility, excellent public education, limited public transportation, and economic and residential growth expanding in all directions.

Lee County is one of the highest populated counties in the state with more than 115,000 residents spread over 608 square miles. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, African Americans make up a quarter of the population. Residents 65 and over make up 8.1 percent of the population, and 4,179 of them are disabled. In Lee County 11.7 percent of families live below the poverty level as compared to 10.2 percent nationwide. In 1999, the county's median household income was $30,952, lower than the national median income of $41,944. Residents spend an average of 20.6 minutes traveling to work from home and of the 52,119 residents that commute to work in Lee County, 43,584 ride alone, 5,629 carpool, 279 ride public transit service, 981 walk, while 446 find other means of getting around.

There are many factors that contribute to a relatively favorable quality of life in Lee County. There is an 81.4 percent rate of residents with high school diplomas and 27.9 percent with college degrees, which is slightly higher than the national average. The majority of the jobs are in education, health, social services, manufacturing, and retail, which complements the highly skilled work force. All these things have played a significant role in the county and cities competing with the major cities such as Montgomery, Birmingham, and Mobile, in attracting jobs, companies and residents.

Russell County

Russell County, located in east Alabama, was established December 18, 1832, following the Alabama General Assembly Act. Russell County was named after Mobile's military officer Col. Gilbert C. Russell, who fought in the Creek Wars. Russell County is primarily rural with the exception of Phenix City, and is wedged between Lee County, and Fort Benning and Columbus, Georgia, giving the county potential for economic and residential growth within the region. Such growth adds to tax revenues and provides opportunities for its residents. The county is located at the intersections of U.S. highways 80, 280, and 431, and within forty-five minutes of Interstates 185 and 85, allowing residents from rural communities to commute for jobs, shopping, and other services.

According to the 2000 Census Bureau, Russell County had a population of 49,756, with a racial make-up of 56.7 percent Caucasian, and 40.8 percent African American. The county spans 1,677 square miles. Of the population, 60.8 percent graduated high school, while another 9.9 percent received a Bachelor's degree. Residents spend an average of 24.6 minutes commuting to work. In 1999, the median household income was $27,492, which is significantly smaller than national average, but higher than both Bullock and Macon and still considered to be relatively good in Alabama.

II. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF COGs

This chapter outlines the historical background of Councils of Governments and federal legislature actions. The chapter opens with early development of COGs in the 19th century. The chapter is divided into the three waves of transformations that COGs have experienced since their inception. The section on the first wave describes the federal government's initiatives to develop COGs and their reasons for supporting COGs. The second wave section includes a discussion of how the federal government's policies and programs encourage the growth of COGs in local communities, their change from single-purpose to multi-purpose organizations, and the rise of the Ronald Reagan Era. I conclude the chapter with the third wave, describing the effects of Reaganism and the abandonment of federal governmental funding, COGs realignment from federal to state and local government control, and the beginning of entrepreneurship for COGs.

In the early 19th century, the formation of single-propose/special districts developed out of the demands on the public sector to support large concentrations of people. Fostered by the local governments and private sources, they were occasionally facilitated by the state (Gage 1992). States' legislative actions, intended to preserve the fortunes of the cities, proposed the creation of single-purpose/special districts or quasi-governmental units that would meet specific needs of individual cities. The cities would require few regulations, and have little or no coordination between them, because of the competition among the metropolitan areas. In the early 1900s, Boston's Mayor Andrew J. Peters believed the failure of metropolitan communities to unify would affect their export trade because of undeveloped shipping facilities, street connections, housing, and inflated cost of governmental service programs (Wallis 1994). Many wanted the integrated government to be active and effective in securing a broad range of services. In 1898 the Greater New York Metropolitan Area was formed and exercised limited responsibility over the surrounding boroughs. Elected officials from each borough sat on the Board of Estimation.

Initially the unification was met with resistance from the major players within the central cities because they did not see how they could benefit from unification. Many people had begun to move to the suburbs, so the power shifted and the central city became overwhelmed (Wallis 1994). Many people realized that they wanted special-district/single-purpose authorities that could operate schools, hospitals, public works, and libraries, but within the city boundaries. The federal government believed that introducing such districts would lead to fragmentation of the administration within regions and lead to reduction of accountability and responsiveness (Wallis 1993). The federal government understood why many wanted special-district/single-purpose authorities to handle services and infrastructure; the advocates for change believed that special district administration would be more responsive to the needs of the local communities and users of the services.

In 1920, the metropolitan government finally, after years of debate, established the first comprehensive regional planning commission (Gage 1988). During this time of resistance the suburban municipalities adopted professional administration and techniques of zoning, which (ironically) were supported by the city. They achieved this without giving up the power of the local governments (Wallis 1994). The commissions were comprised of locally elected officials and were only able to override plans when proposals failed to meet the minimal requirements of the regional planning commission. Other than the small power the regional planning commissions had, the local communities they serviced and the federal government remained in control. In the early days of single-purpose/special districts, they were guided by the federal government. The establishment of the Los Angeles Metropolitan County Planning Commission led in 1925 to the experimental COG in Cleveland. The onset of regional planning was fully into the voluntary phase under governmental and private auspices. Once the experimental phase began in 1925, the Great Depression and the 1930s' economic collapse sparked an inclination for radical reform of the federal government. Into the early 1950s, regional planning organizations were aligned with local public and private sectors. In the 1950s Detroit established the first Council of Governments (COG), which was still a weak regional planning commission. The COG attempted to exercise its authority, including overrides in land development matters, but did not succeed (Gage 1992).

The First Wave

Regional Councils of Governments emerged because of changing conditions in urban and rural areas that posed new challenges for the federal government. Urban areas had a great deal of slum housing, overpopulation, poor health, and middle class flight, which crippled the inner-cities' ability to maintain a minimal level of services for citizens. The initial implementation of regional COGs during the 1950s allowed the federal government to support local governments with projects mutually understood by, and beneficial to, all parties; as well as resolve the earlier issues and concerns of the local governments (Wallis 1994). Federal legislation articulated the unwritten rules that existed from the beginning: "stay with the feds, maintain a low profile, provide comprehensive planning assistance only, don't compete with the public sector governments, and don't compete with the private sector business" (Atkins and Wilson-Gentry 1992:466). The following years marked the rise of COGs, whose numbers rose from 50 in 1950 to 669 by the mid-1970s. The federal government's primary goal was to support the regional councils, to keep a watchful eye over local communities, and maintain arm reach control over the state and local governments (Grigsby 1996).

During the 1960s, the federal government offered incentives for local governments to create regional COGs. The federal government offered additional funding "through categorical grant programs and preferential treatment in legislation or regulations to regional councils as eligible recipients" (Grigsby 1996:54). The federal government promoted regional councils as regional planning organizations with the amendment of the 1959 Housing Act, the Federal Highway Act of 1962, the Urban Mass Transit Act of 1964, and Section 702 (c) of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965. Each of these Acts established requirements for COGs to act as a basis for determining the distribution of federal grants and loans for project development (Wallis 1994; Grigsby 1996). In addition, the federal government added Section 204 of the Metropolitan Development Act, which established regional review requirements for projects under 30 different federal grants and loan programs. In 1968 the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act, Office of Management and Budgeting (OMB), and the A-95 grant process coordinated 50 federal programs and, in 1971, they extended it to

100 federal programs (Grigsby 1996; Atkins and Wilson-Gentry 1992). The legislative actions taken allowed the federal government a certain amount of control over the state and local governments.

The Second Wave

The second wave of regional governance gained momentum during the 1970s. The focus of the second wave was promoting efficient and effective developmental infrastructure. The legislature created criminal justice coordination councils (CJCC) which administered comprehensive regional law enforcement and criminal justice programs (Atkins and Wilson-Gentry 1992). The federal government wanted the regional entities to provide a basis for distributing funds to the metropolitan communities as well as to coordinate a mechanism for establishing a development plan. Because of the significance of their role, COGs became a fourth layer of government for many counties. Even though COGs were voluntary organizations with legislation backing them, their numbers increased rapidly, and by the 1970s, nearly 90 percent of all counties were members, primarily because local governments wanted to obtain federal grants (Atkins and Wilson-Gentry 1992).

During this time 76 percent of regional council programs were funded by the federal government (Gage 1992). They pressed for joint loans and credit pools, as well as technical services, for local communities to further the purpose of COGs, which was to unite these various communities to achieve things that concerned all. The COGs did not achieve any higher political power, but they were accepted by local communities. This resulted in conflict with COGs' private advocates who believed their lack of power contributed to the inability to deliver services. During the second wave, COGs worked toward changing their role to make themselves more purposeful, but still remain unthreatening to the local governments.

The second wave sparked an opportunity for single-purpose organizations to evolve into multi-purpose organizations in terms of their work. The legislation of 1973 instituted the initiation of job training, employment improvement, and area aging agencies, which coordinated social services for the elderly in their regions (Grigsby 1996). Between 1972 and 1977, federal legislation authorized acts for pollution-mitigation initiatives in coastal zone management resources planning, noise pollution control, disaster assistance planning, and water and air pollution control. In 1977, the Air Quality Control Regions (AQCR) motivated COGs to address issues such as sewer treatment, solid waste management, water supply, and port development. The second wave marked the regional councils' increase of power over regional growth (Wallis 1994, Grigsby 1996, Atkins and Gentry-Wilson 1992). The 1974 Fiscal Disparities Act was introduced by Congress, mandating the sharing of tax bases throughout the metropolitan areas. The Fiscal Disparities Act states that 40 percent of all new commercial and industrial development be pooled and redistributed into metro area communities, based on fiscal capacity, in order to address social inequality as well as fiscal disparity (Wallis 1994).

In addition to the Fiscal Disparities Act, multi-purpose/special districts contributed to the establishment of growth management systems. In the 1970s, growth management laws were passed by eight states for the protection of sensitive environmental areas such as coastal areas and wetlands. Under the growth management umbrella they formed the Developments of Regional Impact (DRI) department. The DRI was an important element of growth management because its objective was to review all local developmental projects (such as shopping malls and office parks) to predict the impacts beyond economics and beyond their permitted jurisdictions. DRI sought to address local governments that were maximizing their own economic interests while causing havoc on minority groups in the community. DRI established requirements for both local and regional planning organizations for many states under growth management (Wallis 1994). During the 1970s it laid the groundwork for regional COGs to use data and data-analysis techniques to assess the dynamics of regional development. Legislative bodies addressed social equality issues in many states by establishing the Fair Share Doctrine in 1975. The doctrine required that metropolitan communities be responsible for providing affordable housing in their regions (Wallis 1993; 1994). The federal government upheld its end of the bargain by providing enough support for the COGs not to be tempted to break unwritten laws. Its funding ensured the COGs' loyalty and aligned them with the federal government in the 1960s and through the 1970s (Atkins and Wilson-Gentry 1992).

Top-down

Near the end of the 1970s and with the election of Ronald Reagan, the second wave began losing its momentum and COGs were losing federal funding (Gage 1992). The election of Reagan brought more unexpected changes to the way regional councils would operate. COGs had kept a low profile in order to be accepted into local society yet maintain a federal agenda. COGs provided only planning assistance thus increasing acceptance of them by local governments. In many ways, this had paid off for many regional COGs (Wallis 1994). The fact that many COGs were receiving funds and sharing these funds with local governments while possessing no political power, and the fact that they were non-aggressive, made them effective (Dodge 1990). However, the federal government's participation kept many local members feeling estranged because the programs were operated through a top-down approach and this heightened local suspicions.

The Third Wave

The Reagan administration began the "fend for yourself" mentality, which forced regional councils to realign with states in order to reduce the federal budget (Dodge 1990:357). The decrease in funding caused regional councils to "realign with local-government sectors in search of support" (Gage 1988:483-484), shifting their direction toward entrepreneurship. According to Atkins, the decrease in federal money gave rise to the "local entrepreneurial council," which took shape in 1977 (Gage 1992:212). The money contributed by these local entrepreneurial councils continued to increase from 17.8 percent to 50.9 percent in 1988 (Gage 1992:212). It was during the Reagan era when the majority of federal funds were pulled from regional councils and given back to local governments. The regional councils realized that they needed to diversify their activities and shift their alignment. They moved from dependence on the federal government to utilization of contract services, and coordinated with state policies and budget committees. They became active in the agendas of state capitols, learned how to work within the restraints of their funding, and realized that they had to compete for federal funds with other recipients (Atkins & Gentry 1992).

In conclusion the federal policies, funding and support that helped to endorse the inception of COGs initially were some of the same things that almost led to the downfall of COGs. The change in funding motivated COGs to form a regional association that enabled them to speak collectively on behalf of all Alabama’s COGs. Alabama’s Regional Council Association, which will be discussed in greater detail later, has been very productive in its efforts to assure funding for COGs as well as acting as a hub for exchange of information between the twelve COGs. The changes brought about by the third wave fueled the entrepreneurship attitude of many COGs because they realized that it was required for their survival.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter outlines the conceptual framework of this study through discussions of bureaucracy, trust, social capital, and power. First I will explain the reason why governments are organized as bureaucracies, along with the advantages and disadvantages of this structure. This will be followed by a discussion on norms of trust, social capital and power.

Bureaucracy

According to Max Weber, a bureaucracy is an:

> organization that maximizes technical efficiency through a large number of administrative rules, horizontal differentiation, complexity, span of control, permanent administrators, exclusivity of membership and promotion within the organization, vertical differentiation of the authority structure, centralization of decision making, and specialization of roles/divisions of labor (Alter 1998:260-261).

When dealing with large-scale social problems, organizations have preferred to use the bureaucratic form. Bureaucratic organizations have often worked efficiently and effectively for large populations. When dispensing health and welfare benefits this has been the primary type of organizational form used because it allows organizations to formalize and routinize vast amounts of work (Weber 1946; Alter 1999).

Max Weber acknowledges that there are eight characteristics of ideal organizations that make it possible for them to effectively achieve the maximum amount of work (Blau and Meyer 1987:29-21, Blau 1963:1-2). These characteristics are:

1. The regular activities required for the purposes of organization are distributed in a fixed way as official duties.
2. Organization of offices follows the principle of hierarchy; that is each lower office is under the control and supervision of a higher one.
3. Operations are governed by a consistent system of abstract rules… [and] consist of the application of these rules to particular cases.
4. The ideal official conducts his office … [in] a spirit of formalistic impersonality …without hatred or passion, and hence without affection or enthusiasm.
5. Employment in the bureaucratic organization is based on technical qualifications and is protected against arbitrary dismissal.
6. Officials are subject to authority only with respect to their impersonal obligations
7. Being a bureaucratic official constitutes a career. There is a system of promotions according to seniority or to achievement, or both.
8. Specific sphere of competence … has been marked off as part of a systematic division of labor.

Weber believed if these rules were implemented as intended, organizations could operate with an impersonal and rational orientation toward tasks, which is conducive to their ability to be efficient (Blau 1963). The equal treatment of employees limits political infighting within organizations. Even when organizations work to operate according to the rules of bureaucracies, there are some negative aspects that exist within the structure.

Weber and others recognized that along with the positive effects of bureaucracies there exist negative consequences. Since organizations strive to increase their superiority and professionalism through bureaucracy, they tend to monopolize information, resist change, and act autocratically. Therefore they exclude outsiders' ability to determine the bases on which their decisions are made. Once organizations/bureaucracies become embedded within the social structure they are hard to destroy. The change in characterization of organizations from bureaucracies to democracies results in demand for equality before the law and privilege in the personal sense. Bureaucracies have the potential to create more rules and procedures that facilitate contradictions and, eventually an organization even less responsive to public opinion (Blau 1963; Blau and Meyer 1987).

Consequently, Weber ignored the systematic way operations are carried out. This influenced the rise of subsequent operations in the structure of organizations by other students of organizations. These informal relations help to form informal organizations within the formal organizations. These informal organizations are necessary for the operation of formal organization, because they provide means of communication, cohesion, and protection of the integrity of organizations. The ties that form due to constant contact contribute to trust, social capital, and power that generate organizational legitimacy.

Trust

According to sociologist James S. Coleman, trust has a four part definition: (1) placement of trust allows actions to be conducted that would not otherwise occur, (2) trust works if the person is trustworthy, and can have adverse affects if he/she is not, (3) trust is a voluntary action that gives access to resources (physical, financial, and social capital) to the trustee with no real commitment, (4) a time lag exists between actions and results (Coleman 1990). Sociologist Diego Gambetta says that “trust is one of the most important social concepts that helps human agents to cope with their social environment and is present in all human interaction” (T3 Group 2007).

Many scholars recognize trust as “a mechanism which—in a very basic sense—allows for social interaction” within and between organizations (Bachman 2007). Though there are many definitions for trust, there is no one cognitive definition that dominates with a clear notion of trust. Regardless of the different definitions, many can agree that without trust cooperation would not exist and ultimately there would be no society. The bottom line according to many studies is that trust affects a group’s or organization’s performance. Trust is an important factor for the existence of social capital within social systems. Trust essentially is the building block of cohesiveness within and between organizations/bureaucracies. Trust is a feature of social capital based on a group of social norms and values and aides in the development and growth of societies, as well as facilitates collective resolution of community problems.

Social Capital

Lyda Hanifan coined the term “social capital” in 1916. He described social capital as “those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people” (Hanifan 1916:130). Hanifan’s primary concern was people’s good will, sympathy, and social interaction among them that make up the social unit. Even though he had identified all the crucial elements that account for social capital, he did not gain notoriety until much later, when sociologist Jane Jacobs (1961) focused on relationships in urban life and neighborhoods, and Pierre Bourdieu on (1961) social theory. According to James S. Coleman (1990), social capital "refers to institutional arrangements- social trust, norms of reciprocity and tolerance, and networks of informal association- that foster voluntary cooperation among individuals" (Brown, 1998:228). Coleman stressed that social capital was not a single entity, but rather a variety of different entities, which function to facilitate the actions of individuals. While Coleman focused a great deal of his work on the individual actions of people, Robert Putnam took social capital to the macro level, dealing with organizations and groups.

Robert D. Putnam credits Coleman for reinventing the social capital concept. Putnam helped shift social capital into the research and policy realm. Putnam defined social capital as:

> Features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. For a variety of reasons life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital. In the first place, networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust. Such networks facilitate coordination and communication, amplify reputations, and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved. Finally, dense networks of interaction probably broaden the participants' sense of self, developing the 'I' into the 'we,' of enhancing the participants' taste for collective benefits. (Putnam 1995:67)

Daily interactions are the premises that enable people to build communities, commit themselves to one another, and strengthen organizations that knit the social fabric of life. A sense of belonging helps to create widespread and transitive trust among members of a large group comprised of social networks of “strangers” who have no personal relationships beyond public interactions. Frequent interactions among social groups in large communities help foster trust and tolerance relationships among the individuals, which help to achieve societal norms and “generalized reciprocity” that have social and economic gains (Szreter 2002).

According to Putnam, there are three reasons why social capital is important to societies. First, social capital allows citizens to collectively resolve problems easily, because people work cooperatively. Second, social capital allows communities to advance smoothly. When people are trusting and trustworthy, and are subject to repeated interactions with fellow citizens, everyday business and social transactions are less costly. Third, social capital widens our awareness of how our lives are linked, which helps to “develop or maintain character traits that are good for the rest of society” (Putnam 2000:288). The flow of helpful information through these networks facilitates societies’ and organizations’ abilities to achieve goals. While there are clearly benefits to social capital, there are downsides as well. Organizations that have high levels of social capital also have the means to exclude and subordinate others.

There are three components of social capital that must be considered when examining the dark side of social capital. They are bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. All forms of social capital can “reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups” which may encompass people of different social divides (Putnam 2000). The kind of social capital that exists will help to determine if an organization has strong positive externalities for society or more exclusive benefits for its members only.

Bonding social capital usually is formed when individuals that have shared identity relations form an organization or group. A bond usually develops and strengthens within these groups (Ponthieux 2004). The members gravitate to these particular organizations because others are “like” them and no other justifications are required. It provides social and psychological support to individuals as well as assists them with other forms of capital, such as financial and physical. Bonding social capital has the tendency to reinforce segregation, which leads to groups acting as exclusive networks with emphasis on continuous identification of insiders versus outsiders (Lin 2001; Adams 2005).

Bridging social capital develops between organizations (Ponthieux 2004). The mechanisms of bridging social capital strengthen links between groups and other actors and organizations (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer 2002). Bridging social capital brings members in contact with people from a cross section of society, and contributes to societal norms and trust between people. The heterogeneous mix of citizens contributes to the formation and crosscutting ties of voluntary organizations, and their ability to work together.

Linking social capital refers to relationships between organizations in different social strata in a hierarchy where power, social status and wealth are accessed by different groups. According to Woolcock (2001) this gives organizations the capacity to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond the community.

The different forms of social capital help shed light on the downsides of what can happen when there are high levels of social capital within or between organizations.

Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* focuses on the positive and inclusive identity of what social capital brings to societies, but fails to equally contribute to understanding the negative impact social capital can have on communities and organizations. In the 1996 article, “The Downside of Social Capital,” Alejandro Portes and Patricia Landolt suggest that the strong ties that bind organizations also enable the exclusion of outsiders (Adams 2005). Pierre Bourdieu stressed the dominant classes’ ability to use their power to manipulate and control forms of capital (Edwards, Foley and Diani 2001). Utilization of all forms of capital can provide groups and organizations the ability to have access to resources. Having access to particular resources gives social organizations the capacity to exercise control over the future of others (Boudieu 1986, in Adams 2005). According to Anderson and Schulman (1999), the dark side of social capital is that it can be unevenly distributed. Access to resources depends on the social location of organizations who attempt to appropriate it (1999:353).

Portes identified four negative consequences of social capital: exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restriction on individual freedom, and downward leveling norms (1998:8). Each will be discussed in more detail. First, the exclusion of outsiders emerges through the strong ties and bounded solidarities that enhance the economic status of the organization’s networks. Organizations effectively shut out others through the trust mechanism that is based on shared identity and a common struggle (Adams 2005).

Social capital’s second negative effect, excess claims on group members, occurs because of the intergroup interactions and competition. Thus organizations that are intertwined and bound by strong normative structures are open to the free-riding problem, because of the expectations and reciprocity demanded of less productive members of the organization (Portes 1998). An inability to break the normative structures in organizations can lead to severe sanctions among socially competitive settings (Adams 2005).

Community or group participation creates demands for conformity, which restricts individual freedoms (Portes 1998:16). Small towns and rural areas have strong levels of social control because of low population density and high visibility (Adams 2005, Portes 1998). The dense "multiplex" networks tying inhabitants together create ground for intense community life and strong enforcement of local norms (Portes 1998:16-17). The strong hold on community or organization leads to restrictions of personal freedoms, which explains why youth and free-minded individuals flee small towns, leading to low levels of human capital. Human capital is the "knowledge, skills, attitudes, aptitudes, and other acquired traits that contribute to production" (Goode 1959:147).

Sometimes there are "situations in which group solidarity is cemented by a common experience of adversity and opposition to mainstream society" (Portes 1998:17). When an individual member of an organization is discouraged or reprimanded because of their achievement outside of the realm of the organization, there may result a "downward leveling of norms that operate to keep members of a downtrodden group in place and force the more ambitious to escape from it" (Portes 1998:17). Positive and negative effects of social capital can lead to internal (within) and external (outside) power upon organizations ability to be effective.

Cohen and Pusak demonstrate that social capital helps to trust and is the basic premise to how large social groups of "strangers" generalize reciprocity, generating widespread trustworthiness that helps to build and strengthen communities and organizations (The World Bank 2006). When low levels of social capital exist there is disharmony and competition among individuals, which contributes to the struggle to resolve problems. The levels and types of social capital can ultimately determine the amount of power the community possesses (Putnam 1993). According to Putnam, "distribution and use of power in society are intimately related to its stocks of social capital: large stocks enable cooperation and lateral decision making, while the absence of social capital requires hierarchical coordination" (Powell and Clemens 1998). The level of social capital stock that a community possesses is an important factor in political and economic development.

Voluntary and nonprofit organizations play an important role in promoting cooperative problem solving. The ability for such an organization to exist can exhibit the level of social capital within that community, since many are formed out of social concerns for the community. Organizations can train their members to work together in a manner that would lead to effective results.

Social capital can break down or reinforce organizational and institutional barriers that undermine a community's economic, political, and social activity. Institutions are often associated with patterns of hierarchical and authoritarian decision making, which may lead to distrust, exploitation, isolation, and stagnation among citizens. The circumstances convince rational citizens that they need to compete with one another to get ahead, which leads citizens to exploit one another. In contrast, when decisions are made in a democratic and pluralistic manner with high levels of cooperation, reciprocity, and trust, rational citizens work cooperatively to make collegial decisions (Putnam 1992; Bratton 1989). When are there are strong civil societies, there are strong governments which lead to strong markets.

Power

There is much discussion on power and people from various disciplines use this concept differently. Even within individual disciplines there are different definitions. The term power evolved from the work of Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli in late 1400s and was expanded upon by French philosopher Michael Foucault in the mid 1900s. Machiavelli saw power as a complex situation that occurs in a society or social setting. Foucault expanded upon Machiavelli's definitions, stating that power:

> Is not a thing that is held and used by individuals or groups. Rather, it is both a complex flow and a set of relations between different groups and areas of society which changes with circumstances and time … is that it is not solely negative (working to repress or control people): it is also highly productive. Power produces resistance to itself; it produces what we are and what we can do; and it produces how we see ourselves and the world" (Danaher, Schirato, and Webb 2000: xiv)

Max Weber expanded upon the definition of power and focused on a different aspect. He defined power "as the ability to impose ones will in the face of resistance" (West 1994:415). Weber's view suggested the "probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests and the probability that a command will be obeyed"

(Adams and Sydie 2001:181). Domination is more "structure of control than mere power that must be exerted each time to gain and hold control" (West 1994:416). Weber indicated that all spheres of social interaction were influenced by structures of domination. Weber was concerned with how domination operated within an administration, because he knew that it could be expressed and functions through administration. Domination is necessary in administration because the power to carry out commands has to be in the hands of somebody (Adams and Sydie 2001). Weber focused his attention on indirect and direct forms of domination.

Indirect forms of domination "involved control over goods or marketable skills, which could be used to constrain the activities of others so that they behaved in the manner required by, and in the interest of the monopolistic entity" (Adams and Sydie 2001:181). Direct forms of domination "involved control over others and an absolute duty to obey, regardless of personal motives or interests" (Adams and Sydie 2001:181).

Authoritative power is the "capability to use legitimacy to convince a person to do something" (Rummel 2007). This manifested authoritative power "wills (command) of the ruler or rulers is meant to influence the conduct of one or more others (the ruled) and actually does influence it in such a way that their conduct to a socially relevant degree occurs as if the ruled had made the content of the command the maxim of their conduct for its very own sake" (Adams and Sydie 2001:182). The ruled group believes that they should be obedient and accept the command as a valid norm (Adams and Sydie 2001). All forms of domination require legitimacy or self-justification. Weber outlined the three principle forms of legitimacy: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal, which are ideal types of domination.

Traditional domination rests on the common belief in customs or traditions that justify or sanctify the existing traditions and the legitimacy of that authority which is thereby empowered (Heydebrand 1994; Adams and Sydie 2001). Charismatic domination is similar to traditional domination in that it is personal. Charismatic domination "based on the fortuitous or timely qualities of the individual leader or ruler by virtue is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Adams and Sydie 201:183). These leaders usually have no established administrative structures, are not officials, or technically trained members.

Rational-legal domination "obedience is secured through acknowledgement of explicitly formulated constitutional rules, in that obedience rests on acceptance of the legitimacy of the legally appointed ruler" (Runciman and Mattews 1978:210 and Adams and Sydie 2001: 184). Weber indicated that rational-legal domination is the purest type of domination, listing five mutually interdependent ideas that signify it:

1. Any legal norm is valid on the grounds of "expediency or value rationality or both" and commands the obedience of all within the "sphere of power" or within the relevant organization.

2. The legal norms are a "consistent system of abstract rules" that have "normally been intentionally established" and that are then applied to particular cases.

3. All are subject to the law, even those who exercise legal authority, and all must behave according to the legal norms.

4. Obedience is a consequence of membership (citizenship) in the organization, and individuals obey only the law.

5. Members of the organization “obey the person in authority” because he or she is legally designated or elected; they do not “owe obedience to him as an individual.” (Adams and Sydie 2001:184)

Rational-legal domination in its purest form works in bureaucratic organizations because a person’s qualifications and merit provide the basis for entry into a position. Conduct within the office will be “regulated by impersonal, formal rules and regulations, which presumably not are subject to gender” or race discrimination (Adams and Sydie 2001:184-185).

Application of Concepts to Cases

The chapters which follow provide descriptive detail of two regional councils in Alabama. These theoretical concepts provide important linkage between otherwise independent and separate political entities, each with their own separate bureaucratic structures. The councils provide a mechanism to develop relationships of trust between leaders of member cities and counties, and to build social capital more generally. The councils have limited power, but, as will be seen, do play important and legally required (by state and federal governments) coordinating roles that cannot be ignored by city or county governments.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Methods and Data

This chapter outlines the methods implemented in the research. The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of Council of Governments and assess their value within their communities and to understand whether they have been an asset. I first describe some of the questions asked during my study. Second, I discuss my limitations and ethical concerns presented during the course of my research. I conclude the chapter with a brief reflection of my experiences in the field and my impressions of my research within east and central Alabama counties.

This study is a qualitative case study based on interviews conducted from summer of 2006 to spring 2007. Secondary information was collected from a variety of sources including articles, public records, archival newspaper clippings, the 1990 and 2000 Censuses, and written history of the individual counties and councils. Data collection was conducted to understand the historical context of the regions studied, the contributions of the regional councils, and to understand how the regions are shaped economically, politically, and socially. The history also demonstrates how the regions received help before and after initiation of regional councils.

I attended city council and regional council meetings to better understand the ways in which actors interact with one another in a formal setting. I also attended church services and local meetings with volunteer clubs in the area to observe how citizens interact with each other. I conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with local city council representatives, current and past executive directors of regional councils, and employees and appointed members of the regional councils. I conducted a total of 50 interviews. The interviews were structured and in-depth, as well as informal and semi-structured. Interviews of the informants occurred at work, home, and over the telephone.

Each interview lasted on average of 30 to 90 minutes and field notes were taken. Interviews have been chosen as the primary data collection form because they allow the researcher to receive as much detailed information as possible as well as to observe the body language of the respondent. The semi-structured open-ended nature of the questions gave respondents an opportunity to share information that they believed to be pertinent to my study, and share situations and experiences that I could use as examples in my study. I utilized the snowball approach whereby the initial informants referred me to others who could contribute to the study. Random sampling was not used since no sampling framework exists. The appropriate representation of parties involved was attained to ensure the validity of the study.

Interviews

Interview questions emerged from the review of the literature. During the interviews, respondents were asked to explain their positions in relation to the board of the regional council. The questions were geared toward the informants' beliefs as to what makes regional councils effective as well as how they believed the council to be beneficial for their community. The central questions were: Who has access to resources, and control over choices to achieve their desires within the community? Do you have faith that there are systems in place to support and create smooth processes to achieve goals? How would you describe the regional council's willingness to help in a time of need? Are there any groups of people in the regional council who prevent the city councils from achieving their goals? Who is involved in the regional council outside of city council members? Who are the major players involved in decisions made by regional councils?

As an exploratory study, the questions were designed to allow themes and patterns of response to emerge and guide the researcher to the theoretical implications of the subjects' responses. Each interview was followed up, if possible, to give respondents an opportunity to clarify and reflect upon their experiences.

Limitations

I used open-ended questions instead of closed-ended, because it allows respondents an opportunity to speak freely. Closed-ended questions would have limited the information obtained. Though open-ended questions are open for interpretation, I worked hard to have clarity and avoided double-barrel questions. Since I am using the snowball method and there is no sampling frame, the group of respondents for the study is small, and may not be representative of all regional councils of governments. The interviews were primarily face-to-face, which may introduce biases into the data, which may not have occurred in a mail survey, telephone, or computerized interviews. My race, gender or personality may have caused the respondents to react differently to my research. The nature of asking politicians about their professional role in government may cause respondents to be apprehensive. Several current public officials declined to be interviewed, leading me to interview past city council members, lawyers, mayors, and others in the study.

Ethical Concerns

Since the respondents are public officials and the information requested is about their public role, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines do not apply. I did inform them that the information is for my thesis. The information would become public knowledge since all theses are published and a copy is placed in the library. I informed the respondents that according to the law, the information that I am seeking is public information and I should have access, because they work for the people. The interviews were conducted to acquire complete information, clarity, and validity of the study.

Researcher's Reflections

My initial goal was to interview current city council members, mayors, county commissioners, and executive directors in two counties. I soon realized that my sample would be too small, and would not provide me with an accurate perception of the councils of governments. As time progressed I found myself expanding the number of counties in my study. I also included past city council members, mayors, and executive directors. I gained access to past executive directors and employees of different regional councils through my professor's connections. The respondents provided me with information that helped me to structure my research objectives. The knowledge they possessed from their prior experiences working for regional councils proved to be valuable.

In the beginning I attended a great number of city council meetings and citizen oriented functions to gain an understanding of the community. I watched closely the interactions of public officials with the citizens who attended these functions. Some of the functions were simply speaking engagements on topics that were of concern to citizens. I gradually worked my way over to city council meetings, which I attended initially without taking notes, as an opportunity for observation. I did not want to bring attention to myself. The first couple of times I simply watched the interactions of city council members, citizens, developers, and the city staff. I took a special interest in understanding the relationships that existed between the actors in these communities. I knew that such an understanding would bring me clarity from an insider perspective and still allow me to be an outsider with a neutral stance.

City council meetings as well as government operations differed between the cities. Auburn and Tuskegee both operate under a city-manager form of government; the mayor is simply a “glorified city council member” and performs ceremonial duties and has little power. The city manager acts “as the … non-political, administrative and executive officer” and handles the day-to-day operations of the city (Holden 1916:337). The city manager acts as the buffer between the administrative staff and mayor. The city council members vote on policies, city ordinances, and zoning that affect the city.

When I attended Auburn’s city council meetings there was usually a variety of people attending and I was able to blended in. The meetings usually started on time and lasted long because the council had to vote on a great number of economic development projects. The council members have designated seating raised above the citizens. There was usually a physical division between citizens, developers, city employees, activists, press, and observers. In the time that I observed the city council, the membership shifted from a mixture of men and women to predominately Caucasian men, and a single

African-American in Ward 1. The ward position is secure for African-Americans, because it is where the majority of them reside. The council not only shifted in terms of race and sex, but in relation to the occupations of the members. They shifted from primarily educators of all levels, administration of the university, and business people to a board that's made up of businessmen, bankers, brokers, and attorneys which changes the dynamics of the city council. There is a mixture of middle-age members and younger, less experienced members who have different experiences and perceptions regarding city growth and changes that need to be occur.

The meetings in Tuskegee differed from those in Auburn in many ways. Like Auburn, the Tuskegee city council members represent the majority of the community. The council has equal representation of men and women. The members represent local educators and social workers within the Tuskegee community. They have been part of the reason that the city council changed its form of government to give them more say so in the city's business. The meetings sometimes start late because work sessions which occur prior to the meeting run over due to citizen concerns. After attending my second meeting, Mayor Johnny Ford introduced himself and welcomed me to Tuskegee and invited me back anytime.

Ford had acted as mayor of Tuskegee for six terms (24 years) until his 1996 defeat to Ronald Williams. Before his return to Tuskegee, Ford was elected as an Alabama state representative, during which time he helped pass legislation that was beneficial to Macon County as well as Tuskegee. In 2004, after six years with the state legislature, Ford returned to Tuskegee to be mayor after unseating Dr. Lucencia Williams Dunn. Although he returned to his old post, he was re-elected under the new form of government, which would not grant him the same level of power he held in his earlier six terms.

The regulars noticed that I was not a native, but they did not approach me, rather they watched me watching them. The citizens are mostly concerned with how the city is spending tax payers' money. The citizens have a great deal of experience with politicians who have embezzled money from the city and run the city into its current economic situation. The council's primary focus is on providing seniors and youth with an activity center, providing elderly with transportation, the hospital, economic stability, and cleaning up Tuskegee. The city-manager role was implemented when the residents got tired of watching the local government spend tax-payers' money recklessly and with nothing to show. They petitioned for a change in government from a strong mayor form to a city-manager form. They wanted to keep politics separate from everyday administration and to minimize a single individual's access to total power. They want to revive Tuskegee's economy and give students a reason to stay and spend money in the community.

Opelika once struggled economically because of the relocation of textile companies and can understand what Tuskegee is going through, but not to the same extent. In Opelika the meetings vary; there are times when citizens show up in droves and other times when there is a very small turnout. At the first meeting I was singled out by Councilman Clarence Harris, who politely motioned me to the front and asked me "Who are you and what brings you to Opelika?" after a brief Q and A, I returned to my seat and the meeting convened. The meeting began with prayer, similar to Tuskegee, and the Pledge of Allegiance. Opelika operates under a strong mayor form of government; the mayor makes all final decisions, which is similar to Union Springs in Bullock County. Mayor Gary Fuller is similar to other mayors that I interviewed who are or were businessmen and successful in their careers. Mayor Fuller is similar to Mayor Earl Hinson of Union Springs, with the exception that Hinson is a part-time mayor and a current businessman.

In Union Springs, city council meetings are similar to those in Opelika, because there are usually droves of people that show up when there are things that affect them. However, there is a difference in how the two city councils handle things. The Union Springs city council is a strong-mayor, male-dominated council. There are two African-American representatives on the five-member council, which is not representative of the racial make-up of the community that is 74% African American. These two city council members are aware of the racial challenges that residents experience in Union Springs, since they both grew up in Bullock County, which has historically experienced race-related issues. Unlike Opelika, which addresses situations by including them in the agenda and following the agenda, such adherence to a schedule does not always occur in Union Springs. When there are issues that affect the African-American community the agenda can suddenly change or things postponed, because they show up in droves to fight. The city council used this tactic to discourage the opposing citizens until they stop showing up sometimes. Being at these meetings is like something that is surreal, because I would think that being in the 21st century things like this would not easily occur, but that is not the case.

There are many community leaders that encourage people to attend meetings regardless of what is on the agenda, so that these events are less likely to occur. All these factors taken into account helped to prepare me for attending regional council meetings, which largely consisted of successful businessmen and women working towards maximizing their resources for the benefit of their community.

The majority of regional councils meet only four times a year because the members are busy and they do not have enough business that would require monthly or bi-weekly meetings. The meetings usually take place during working hours, which could hinder citizens from attending. At all four LRCOG meetings I attended I was the only citizen present. The first two meetings I was viewed with suspicion by the executive director. I understand that because she had come under fire many times before, I was on her radar. Once I proved that I would attend on a regular basis the members began trusting me and became open to being interviewed. There were times when they told me things that were off the record, but the majority of the time they were open to discuss much of what I was concerned about. The meetings were different than those held by the SCADC.

The executive director of SCADC, Tyson Howard, did not respond to my attempts to reach him by phone or email during my research. The first time we met was when I attended a board meeting in Montgomery. Upon my arrival I was invited to be seated at the round table with the other members by Mrs. Harper, from Shorter, a friend of Howard’s. I thought this was strange because this did not occur ever at LRCOG. SCADC’s meetings usually begin with a breakfast, because the members have long commute. Only about three-fourths of the council members were present and they trickled in and out at different times during the course of the meeting. The meeting was quick, short and smooth. The professional staff gave updates on the current projects they had in motion and suggestions for things they were interested in doing to help the communities. Though the council's members were in agreement with the professional staff, they had great concerns over whether or not efforts were geared solely towards retail investments. The Probate Judge from Pike County stressed the need for more economic investments in the Black Belt, stating "we have fixed roads to give us access, but when do we move on from there to get more money for our communities?"

The two regional councils have similar missions to provide the best for the communities in their jurisdictions. All things taken into account, gaining trust from the public officials, executive directors, and professional staff took time. The work that many of them do is constantly being scrutinized, which makes them very apprehensive about answering questions. Like most politicians and people in the public eye, there is always a limitation of information they are willing to provide for fear of it being printed. Interviewing a range of respondents allowed for some of the truth to come out, but there is always three sides to the story what he says, what she says, and the truth somewhere in the middle.

V. ALABAMA ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

This chapter outlines the historical and present day status of regional councils in Alabama. First I discuss the federal government's role in defining of regional councils. There will be a discussion of enabling legislation allowing formation of Alabama's regional councils. Next, I will describe the Alabama Association of Regional Councils (AARC) and how they work with the twelve COGs that exist today. Lastly, I detail obstacles the AARC faces.

Formation of Alabama Regional Councils

Alabama's twelve regional councils were created between 1963 and 1971. The initial six were established after the adoption of Act 63-584 to serve the urban areas of the state, primarily as a response to several federal program initiatives. Much of the impetus for creating these multi-county organizations came from the passage of the Federal Aid Highway Act (1963), the Appalachian Regional Development Act (1965), and the Public Works and Economic Development Act (1965). These acts promoted the creation of regional organizations throughout the state, leading ultimately to the establishment of Alabama's twelve regional councils. All twelve councils developed as voluntary associations of municipalities and county governments within each region. The member local governments typically pay an annual per capita amount to the council to maintain their membership (AARC, 2006).

Utilizing administrative funds, local development funds (project grant funds) provided by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and Economic Development Administration state financing sources, Alabama's regional councils address a wide range of economic development and quality of life issues. They carry out their responsibilities under the authority of state legislative acts and executive orders. The earliest state act authorizing the creation of regional planning organizations was passed in 1935. The Alabama Legislature passed additional legislation in 1963 in response to the Federal Highway Act authorizing multi-jurisdictional planning and providing guidelines for the formation of regional councils in Alabama during the next six years (AARC 2006).

In 1969, Act 1126 was passed by the state legislature authorizing local governments to establish regional councils and petition the governor for certification. This act, with its subsequent amendments, has provided the legal authority for regional council operations since that time. Governor George Wallace signed an executive order in 1971 that established the current boundaries of Alabama's regional councils (Figure 1) and certified the organizations as the state's official multi-county planning and development entities (AARC 2006).

The activities of the state's regional councils have evolved over time to reflect local and regional needs, as well as state and federal program initiatives. The late 1960s and early 1970s focused on local and regional planning assistance (primarily through HUD's 701 Local Planning Assistance Program), grant writing, and becoming certified Economic Development Districts facilitate the funding for local governments to obtain grants for infrastructure development which is under the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). The EDA was established under 1965 Public Works and

Economic Development Act as a means to “generate jobs, help retain existing jobs, and stimulate industrial and commercial growth in economically distressed areas in the United States” (EDA 2007). They “provide grants for infrastructure development, local capacity building, and business development to help communities alleviate conditions of substantial and persistent unemployment and underemployment in economically distressed areas and regions” (Crater PDC 2007). The EDA mission is to empower these distressed urban and rural communities to provide stability for their areas or regions.

Some became certified Local Development Districts (LDD) a “network of multi-county planning and development organizations” that ensure the effective and efficient use of funds that will strengthen local participants throughout the state (ARC 2007). The LDD’s most important role is to “identify priority needs of local communities” (ARC 2007). LDDs work in partnership with Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC).

The ARC formed in 1963 by John F Kennedy was directed towards building a “comprehensive program for the economic development of the Appalachian Region” (ARC 2007). The ARC is divided into two areas (Area Development Program and Highway Program) which address four goals identified in the Commission’s strategic plan:

1. Increase job opportunities and per capita income in Appalachia to reach parity with the nation.
2. Strengthen the capacity of the people of Appalachia to compete in the global economy.
3. Develop and improve Appalachia’s infrastructure to make the Region economically competitive.

4. Build the Appalachia Development Highway System to reduce Appalachia's isolation (ARC 2007).

The ARC provides funding for several projects that pertain to their goals throughout the Appalachia Region, which have created employment opportunities, expanded healthcare, and provided comprehensive strategic planning for local communities and countless other beneficial services (ARC 2007).

By the mid-1970s most of the councils in Alabama had begun providing an array of human service programs, particularly programs to assist senior citizens. Many of the regional councils established themselves as Area Agencies on Aging and began offering a range of programs for the elderly created under the Older Americans Act, with funding assistance from the Alabama Commission on Aging. Several of the councils also became Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) during the 1970s in order to provide transportation planning services in their metropolitan areas. During the 1980s a number of regional councils took on the responsibility of providing public transportation service in their larger municipalities and rural counties. In the 1990s the councils added programs in economic development finance (regional revolving loan programs) and geographic information systems (GIS) to their portfolio of services (AARC 2006).

The exact mixture of programs and services offered by a single regional council reflects the unique local problems and issues found in that region, and the presence or absence of state and crosscutting programs (such as services for the elderly and local planning assistance). Some of the less common services and programs that regional councils provide, including child development, continue to evolve in response to local needs, state and federal program initiatives, and changing economic circumstances (AARC 2006).

The regional councils are not governed by a higher level of government. The regional councils in existence today have been serving their regions for at least 35 years. Regional councils have become an institution where municipal and county governments have an opportunity to promote and implement activities that will result in change.

Alabama Association of Regional Councils

In the midst of forming regional councils, the 12 executive directors formed the Alabama Association of Regional Councils (AARC) and operated as the governing board of the organization. The AARC organization is a support system for the executive directors of the COGs. The monthly meetings give the 12 executive directors the opportunity to share information and strategies to address need in their areas. The AARC used to have an executive director that assisted with the daily operations of individual councils, but with the recent departure of its director, the 12 directors decided not to replace the director position and manage the organization on their own.

AARC meetings are held every first Friday of the month in Montgomery at SCDAC. The directors are not paid additional fees for them participation on the board, but rather it’s expected when they sign onto the job, they are only compensated for travel expenses. A majority of the members attend all meetings and try to attend the functions with other organizations because they realize that these networks are serious business. Their dues are based on a payment, according to population, and number of counties within their jurisdiction. They also retain money from special projects, and funding from the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) (LRCOG

2007). The AARC pays a monthly fee ($2,693) to SCADC for rent, and reports all activities to the individual executive boards, which decide on which issues the AARC, should focus its attention (SCADC 2007).

The AARC is currently in compliance with Alabama's Open Meetings Act which replaced the Sunshine Law. The law guarantees Alabama citizens greater access to state and local governments (boards, commissions, agencies, and various levels of governments) that conduct the peoples' business (Secretary of State 2007). Although the Alabama Secretary of State has volunteered to provide the COGs additional service to post their meetings for free, many of the COGs are not interested. Respondents noted that they provide the information on their own individual websites and weren't interested in the State's website. The State's website notifies individuals from different areas within and outside of Alabama about regional council meetings. They email notifications of the meeting and inform individuals that are signed to their website about any changes. The AARC president encourages the members use the state website, because she believes the more information they can provide the public the more they will know about them, and increases the publics' trust of the organization.

When there are issues that affect a majority of the regions, such as transportation and senior services the COGs band together. They work to form coalitions with each other, legislative members, city and county officials, and organizations that can influence the state legislature. The relationships are tricky, because the AARC and COGs in general are at the mercy of the local municipalities they serve, so there cannot be a conflict of interest when it comes to funding. The members of the AARC have to be careful with whom they team up, because the relationships can backfire and prove to be dangerous for their funding (May 2007).

The AARC, in addition to forming task committees that focus on economic development, hazards, fiscal budgets, transportation, and geographic information systems (GIS), have invested time in examining why different regions are having issues managing programs. They have volunteered their service to the Rural Action Commission which will have its official kick off in September. In the meanwhile, individual executive directors have encouraged their local city council members to join in their efforts to work towards fixing issues within their region. The Rural Action Commission implementation followed behind the success of Black Belt Action Commission. They both work towards getting a broader perspective on issues that the zones face. The committees work collectively assisting both the Rural Action Commission (RAC), and Black Belt Action Commission (BBAC), which are statewide initiative programs that measure the quality of education, healthcare, economic development, and the workforce. The AARC has recently implemented and established voluntary committees that focus on education, transportation, economic development, and workforce development within their organization. The differences between the RAC and BBAC is RAC focuses on all of Alabama's rural areas, and BBAC focuses it's primarily efforts in Alabama's black belt counties. Since most black belt counties are rural there is an overlap, in measuring healthcare, education, economic development, and overall quality of life. The greatest difference is BBAC has managed to achieve funding for their organization through grants from various sources, which is what Governor Riley hopes the RAC can achieve for them, since there isn't any funding for the organization in state or federal budgets. The

BBAC's ability to get volunteers and find ways to supply funding towards the projects was the motivation behind the formation of the RAC. Governor Riley hopes that the RAC will work hard to collect data that will identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, wants, and needs of these areas that are crumbling because of lack of resources. The information generated could provide AARC and other local organizations the information for them to come up with solutions and strategies to handling the problems in these destitute areas of Alabama.

Lobbyist

The AARC not only meet to exchange information and strategies, but also to pull resources together in order to obtain and secure money for the COGs. In 2007 AARC managed to secure for the Revolving Loan Funds (RLF) program an additional $12 million in bond funds, doubling the amount of money it received the previous year. RLFs "are designed to assist new and/or expanding businesses" and supply funding to make "deals that create new employment opportunities" (Alarc 2007). Alabama's House of Representatives approved Bill 244, which contained more funding for revolving loans. Many phone calls made by AARC's executive directors also supported the legislation. The AARC pushed local officials to help secure $11 million to maintain the current Area Aging Agency programs. The $11 million will support elderly citizens who are living longer due to medical advancements. AARC has requested an additional $6.3 million to serve the people on the waiting list, which would only fix the here and now problem. The additional funding would not leave room for any extra services for the elderly.

The $11 million requested was denied, but the AARC managed to secure $9 million which covers Medicaid waiver services, nutrition, and senior prescription programs completely. The AARC was disappointed in the decision to cut funding for AAA, but efforts were made by Tyson Howard to find out the reasoning behind the rejections. Howard discovered that there was only a loss of $440,000, which the group agreed is small in comparison to the money it was receiving. The members did not want to "rock the boat" and fight for fear of losing the money that was already granted. The executive directors debated and came to the conclusion that the Meals on Wheels program would suffer most and they would have to figure out alternative means to maintain the current number of meals being distributed (observation 2007).

In recent years AARC has requested that the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) recognize the different transportation needs that exist outside metropolitan areas, since majority of the state is rural.

The lack of qualified metropolitan planning agencies led to creation of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) whose focus was on transportation planning. The formation of MPO stem from a Congressional 1954 act authorizing "organizations composed of public official who he (the Secretary of HUD) finds to be representative of the political jurisdictions within a metropolitan or urban region" (AMPO 2007). This was the first action to give federal support to Council of Governments (COG) and Metropolitan Planning agencies" (NJTPA 2007). In 1962 the enactment of the Federal-Aid Highway Act expanded upon the 1954 act in response to Interstate Highway System construction and rising population growth and issues within cities, which drastically changed metropolitan planning agencies.

The federal government's financial backing helped MPOs grow significantly within highway programs. The federal government required agencies to plan routes through and around urban areas in order to build efficient highways and roads. The act attached conditions that required the federal government to provide financial assistance to projects in urbanized areas of 50,000 or more residents on a continuous base (AMPO 2007). The federal government's required planning process became known as the Three-C (continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative) established the basis for MPOs which exist today.

By the late 1960s most urbanized areas were immersed in the three-C planning process, which shifted attention from continuous transportation planning process to responsiveness planning to meet needs of local areas (AMPO 2007). During this period MPOs and COGs worked collectively to resolve social and transportation issues because they were intertwined. The elected local officials and a single ALDOT representative make up the MPO executive board. The MPO executive board decisions are primarily based on information presented by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) along with advice from ALDOT, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Sometimes they have Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) representing local interests and to address specific plans or situations.

Although the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has the authority to override decisions of the executive board, these situations are less likely to happen in cities whose population exceed 200,000, because the larger cities usually are considered to have a competent transportation planning department.

The federal government provides separate funding for COGs and MPOs because they are funded from different pools of money. Most COGs receive administrative funds for managing, overseeing programs, and providing professional staff to assist executive board members, as well as providing a location for MPO meetings. In urbanized areas with their own planning departments federal funding is given to the local government, and the COGs are merely a clearinghouse for the process. Auburn and Opelika directly receive funding from the DOT for their projects on roads and highways, except for public transportation funding. The money is housed at Lee-Russell Council of Governments, because they not only handle the administrative, but operation and coordination overall of public transportation. The benefits of the MPO and COG working in collaboration and housed in the same building allows the federal government to monitor expenditures, because the COG is more of a moderator for the MPO. Though they are operated out of the same building, MPOs they have their own executive board. There is overlap in that both the COG and MPO may have some members in common.

The 1980's ushered in an era of decentralization of control and authority and reduction of federal funding. This shifted decision-making into the hands of local governments with less intrusion from the federal government. In the wake of Reagan's decentralization of government many MPOs formed their own free-standing organizations outside city or county organizations. Montgomery, Alabama's state capital has a free standing MPO. Though Montgomery County is a member of two COGs, neither benefit from the federal government's funding for administrative cost of the MPO program. Through MPOs and organization like them much of the federal, state, and local funding has been given primarily to metropolitan areas. Rural areas are in competition with each other for funding to construct rural roads, bridges, and maintain the two lane highways that connect rural areas to metropolitan areas. Though MPOs have been a stepping stone for the rise of metropolitan areas economically and socially, many rural areas have suffered in the wake of the process. There has been a major push for federal transportation funding which would help to provide rural areas with some of the same opportunities as the metropolitan areas.

In late 2004 ALDOT selected West Alabama Regional Commission to conduct a two-year project for both rural and metropolitan areas. The two-year planning and consultation pilot project spanned a seven-county region (RPO American 2007). The Nationwide Transportation Study revealed that Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) were the receiving the majority of transportation dollars. While MPOs have done great work with their funding, many rural areas have been continuously loosing money (Eastern Carolina Council 2007). The loss of federal funds for rural transportation is causing great division between the “haves” and the “have nots” in sparsely populated locations. Many states have implemented legislation that would assist with formation of a Rural Planning Organization (RPO).

In October 2006, ALDOT extended rural transportation organizations statewide through the other 11 regional councils/ regional development organizations. The RPO’s purpose is to create an opportunity for local officials to form “multi-modal transportation planning through a structured process” (RPO 2007). The goal is to ensure quality service, competence and fairness in transportation decision-making policies. According to North Alabama Council of Local Government’s (NACOLG) transportation planner, Jesse Turner, there still remain problems that need to be settled in order to make the program effective within rural areas of Alabama. Since the recent implementation of the RPO, Alabama COGs have received administrative funds for the program, which entails studies of different rural areas throughout Alabama. They haven’t received funding to support the work that would need to improve the current conditions of the roads as of yet. Turner anticipates that once the state Department of Transportation works out the problems they will secure funds that the COGs can access to do practical work in these dispersed rural areas.

The AARC collective effort to achieve community development in their respective communities has enabled them to form pertinent relationships and networks with other organizations that are important to their survival. Their actions assist with their efforts to mobilize resources with outside organizations. Though the AARC has learned to maneuver and has improved their networking skills, competition still exists on many levels between organizations/bureaucracies for funding.

Competition

Regional councils sometimes compete with the local governments for AAA funding, because not all AAAs programs are housed under the COG umbrellas. Stand alone AAA programs manage to meet the needs of their cliental, but each program has their own administrative cost within the grants. The advantage of a stand alone AAA is that all efforts are geared towards helping the elderly clients within their jurisdiction, unlike being part of a COG which is geared towards the regional aspects of management of many programs that benefit a larger range of citizens. The advantages of AAA being part of a COGs: 1) they can exchange ideas about their similar programs with each other through their executive directors at monthly meetings, 2) they are able to better coordinate their needs with other organizations/bureaucracies under the umbrella, because their in the same building, 3) they have the opportunity to collectively influence the modifications of programs that are believed to be ineffective or unbeneficial from its original purpose of the constituents. It does not exclude COGs from competing with other organizations that deal with elderly cliental. The COGs as an organization/bureaucracy have to find their place between counties and local municipalities, to provide for their individual residents.

VI. LEE-RUSSELL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Lee-Russell Council of Governments (LRCOG), located in Opelika, is the smallest of twelve regional councils. The LRCOG is obligated to serve residents of Lee and Russell counties and represents both incorporated and unincorporated communities within the two counties. The governing executive board consists of representatives from Auburn, Opelika, Lee County, Phenix City and Russell County. The LRCOG board consists of elected mayors, county commissions, city councils members, and probate judges from the county and from the governing board communities. The governing board members and their communities receive a bulk of the assistance, because they pay annual dues to LRCOG. They do provide smaller communities with assistance with grant writing, senior centers, and other things for a small fee that is based upon the size of the grant being sought. About 95% of the professional staff possesses a Bachelors Degree, because majority of the jobs require that as a minimum. Of the 95% there is 30% of the professional staff that posses a Master's Degree or is in the process of obtaining an advanced degree. The professional have a range of different work experiences. Some of the departmental executive directors have had prior internships at LRCOG, before working at other state agencies, Auburn University, and/or private firms before returning to LRCOG. A majority of the non-professional staff hold high school diplomas, General Education (GED), to associate degrees.

The regional council was first named Lee County Council of Governments, because it was only representative of Lee County. In 1990, Phenix City and Russell County joined to form Lee-Russell Council of Governments. LRCOG, like most regional councils, existed simply because the federal government required communities to have “areawide plans” in order for them to qualify for financial aid grants. The federal government also provided funds to assist with projects that conformed to existing plans. Many local governments saw the creation of COGs as a way to improve the quality of their regions with free money. Similar to other regional councils throughout the United States, LRCOG has evolved from a simple single-purpose planning organization to a multi-purpose social services agency that assists with planning programs. The programs I focus on are public transit, aging agencies, and comprehensive planning.

Budget

The LRCOG $4.3 million budget is derived primarily by funds associated with AAA, Medicaid Waiver, and Lee County Transit Agency (LETA) as shown in (Figure 2). The budget has increased since 1999 because of the rising costs of aging services, public transportation, and health insurance, workers ’ compensation, and employee cost of living raises. From 1999 to 2004, the executive board’s annual dues paid to the LRCOG were $73,543 which comes out to be $2.2 million over a six year period. Annual fees had remained the same during this period (LRCOG 2006).

In 2003, the costs of program administration, contracts, and total expenses increased substantially in comparison with previous years. However, the council operated within the budget despite the increase in expenditures. In 2005, with the rising costs of programs and the depletion of surplus in general funds the staff requested an increase in dues from the local governments.

In 2006, the local government dues increased from 2004 $85,000 to $89,000 to offset the decrease in federal funding and rising cost of managing the programs and services. The professional staff provided LRCOGs executive board members with justification behind the increases. Since COGs are aligned with the state, the staff is provided with state benefit packages. The workers' compensation insurance increased by $9,000. LRCOG added an extension onto their previous building to accommodate their growing staff and with the addition came increased utility costs. Annually the staff is provided a cost of living increase in their salaries to counter the rising cost of housing. There were other increases in costs such as public transportation, meals on wheels, and senior center transportation.

In 2007, LRCOGs requested an increase in annual dues from $89,000 to $93,000 per member, to compensate the professional staff for their hard work, since they have not received merit raises in over seven years. Though LRCOGs already spends $1 million in salaries for both the professional and non-professional staff, the executive director, Suzanne Burnette felt that in order to compete with other organizations for staff, it was time for this to happen, given how hard the employees work. A portion of the funds to LRCOG is money to keep providing services for elderly clients they remove from their Medicaid waitlist, while maintaining the current services for elderly citizens. The majority of the COG's revenue for AAA comes from the federal and state government while the federal and local funds support Alabama's efforts to provide public transportation, both of which are vital to community development.

The majority of the COGs revenue comes from the federal government and is slated for senior services and public transportation, which are vital for community development. A majority of the COGs funding is provided by the federal government, and although the funding has decreased in recent years shown in Figure 3**,** the state follows a major contributor which fluxgates in years while the local funding has increased, but slightly in the last seven years as shown in Table 1. Both federal and state contribute little over $1 million, while local governments spending less than $500,000 in dues collective. The dues that the local governments pay is simply the match money to secure the federal and state money they receive through the COG. Considering the size of LRCOG their budget is substantial compared to that of a COG that has more counties to serve.

Public Transit System

In 1971 the predecessor of LRCOG developed its first long-range transportation planning study for the Auburn-Opelika area. This was its first step in securing money to open up the region and make the Auburn-Opelika area a more attractive community, by allowing people immediate access to highways which would increase resident's mobility. The ability to be an attractive place for people to reside will eventually bring commercial real-estate into the region. The Auburn-Opelika metropolitan status opened the door for to house a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in 1983. The MPO is responsible for managing "federal funds and performs transportation planning (Long Range Transportation Plan, Transportation Improvement Plan, and the Unified Planning Work Program) for the Auburn-Opelika urbanized area" (ALARC 2006). A majority of the money for transportation is for repairs, widening of the highways and roads in Auburn and Opelika. The MPO under the LRCOG's umbrella houses the federal government 80 percent contribution towards operation cost for the Auburn-Opelika public transit system.

Five years after the predecessors of LRCOG began housing the MPO, in 1988 the Lee County Transit Agency (LETA) was established and became the first public transit system which operated in both urban and rural regions in Lee County. Auburn's Mayor, Jan Dempsey, was a driving force behind the LRCOG in providing quality public transportation for the area, because of Auburn's rapid growth. Dempsey realized early on that public transportation would be a desirable attribute for a city to attract all walks of life into the community (Holt 2006). LRCOG was responsible for operating and managing the LETA system. After one year of in-house operation LRCOG contracted the service with a third party, Alabama Limousine for six years. In 1995, LRCOG switched third party contractor and entered into business with Dixie Excursions. They managed LETA system until January 31, 2000, at which time LRCOG contracted with Groome Transportation. Groome Transportation is also responsible for operation of Auburn University's transit system (LRCOG 2006). In October of 2003, LRCOG brought the service back in-house because of constant complaints about the quality of the service (Holt 2006).

The LETA system has always managed to offer customers three types of service: fixed route, paratransit, and demand-response. The agency also contracts its services to "non-profits, governments, and social service agencies to transport clients or members to specific location" (ALARC 2006). The fixed route has designated stops and operates Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. LETA stops in both Auburn and Opelika, including stops at local grocery stores, social service agencies and near low-income neighborhoods, a route which limits the individuals that can access the service. LETA's route excludes access to affluent neighborhoods as well as professional business parks in Auburn or Opelika. These restraints limit the types of employment low-income residents have access to and excludes them from "pulling up by the bootstraps" to better their situation. The routes also limit the method of transportation that affluent residents have access to, because some would like the option of using public transportation.

The paratransit "service is provided to all disabled individuals within the city limits of Auburn-Opelika whose disabilities will not allow them to use the fixed route and have been certified by a physician to ride the door-to-door service" (LRCOG 2006). The paratransit service is required to accompany fixed-route services within ¾ mile of either side of the fixed route according to American Disabilities Act regulations (ADA). The service provides a degree of flexibility for residents who need extra assistance, but needs to be reserved 24 hours prior to use.

The demand-response transit provides serves residents in Lee and Russell County's designated service areas. In Lee the service is provided on a first-come, first-serve basis (LRCOG 2006). The demand-response zones are broken down into east, west, and south zone. Unlike the paratransit, the demand-response units have only one pick-up and drop off time and the zone you live in determines what days of the week you can use the service. Those who live in the west (Loachapoka and Waverly) use the service more frequently and their pick-up days are Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, those living east and south (Beauregard and Beulah), have pick-up days on Tuesdays and Thursdays. In Russell County they utilize LETA primarily to transport the elderly to doctor's appointments and transportation back and forth from the senior centers.

Through all the changes in management and modifications in routes, LRCOG has always financially maintained the LETA since its inception. In 2005, with rising fuel cost, drivers' salaries, insurance, repairs, and other miscellaneous expanses, local government match funds were no longer enough to sustain the transit system. There was high turnover rate due to wage competition from Auburn University's Tiger Transit. Many qualified drivers have left LETA, sacrificing health insurance for higher wages (Staff 2006).

With LETA under attack questions have been raised about LRCOG's ability to manage the transit system. The situation put LRCOG under scrutiny from the public and local municipalities alike. In August of 2005, LRCOG held public hearings to discuss LETA's situation with the citizens of the community and hear their comments on the situation. After the hearing, LRCOG's executive board, along with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) which consists of planning and engineering staff, and Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) of the MPO, convened to figure out the solution to the LETA crisis. The MPO decided to recruit an outside consultant firm to assess the situation and give an outsider's opinion.

In 2005, LRCOG recruited the Carter-Burgess consultant firm to study LETA. The study was initiated to "identify cost-cutting measures and develop a strategy for establishing a financially stable transit operation responsive to the needs of the region" (Carter-Burgess 2007). Carter-Burgess broke the project down into two phases: (1) Identify ways to cut costs and manage within the available budget, (2) Proceed with a strategic plan that would satisfy local expectations of the services and develop recommendation for the operations of LETA.

In the meanwhile, LRCOG asked the local municipalities for more funding to maintain LETA through the following year until the consultant came back with a plan. Though the money was outside the amount agree upon in the beginning of the fiscal year, the situation was due to factors such as raising insurance and gasoline prices which were out of the council's control. LRCOG's executive board members prepared their individual municipalities for the request for additional funding for LETA. Some local municipalities were not satisfied with LRCOG staff inability to anticipate the situation. At Auburn's City Council meeting LRCOG was chastised and publicly humiliated for their lack of being able to maintain their finances (Auburn-Opelika 2006). In the end Opelika, Auburn, Lee and Russell County agreed to supplement funding for LETA. Though the local municipalities agreed to the additional funding for LETA, it would have only taken one municipality to put the transit system in jeopardy.

In January 2007, the Carter-Burgess Consultant Firm completed Phase One of the study to identify cost-cutting measures and establish financial stability for the continued operation of LETA. LRCOG established a Stakeholder Advisory Group, composed of people from various cross-sections of communities in the region, which provided local views concerning the priorities of transit service.

The Phase One Action Plan reflects the successful operation cost-cutting measures of LETA's. It included recommendations of peer reviews, local agencies, and residents to increase the cost efficiency of the LETA service. Carter-Burgess recognized LETA's importance in the community and of public comments regarding particular destinations, so the group tried to minimize the impact of changes to services and retained a majority of the destinations (Carter-Burgess 2007).

In 2006, the *LETA FY* 2006-2007 Action Plan was implemented following recommendations which included: (1) The three fixed routes were reduced to two, saving $24,500 in operational costs over a seven-month period; (2) Paratransit service was not altered because of federal regulation associated with fixed-route services; and (3) Rural demand response eliminated two vehicles. The reduction in vehicle use assisted in reestablishment of the geographic area served two or three days a week area instead of county-wide service five days a week. The overall reduction in a seven-month period was estimated $32,700. Both fixed route and demand response fares were increased. Fixed route increased from $1.00 to $1.50 and demand response went from $1.00 to $3.00 for riders within Auburn-Opelika city limits and $4.00 outside the limits. The increase in fares was estimated to produce $10,000 in revenue for fixed route and $5,300 for demand response service.

The Action Plan administration monitored the impacts of the recommended changes through examining "budget, ridership, and performance measures indicative of system efficiency (such as riders per hour)" (Barter-Burgess 2007:3). The indicators revealed how the changes affected LETA and what further changes would be necessary, if any. Table 1 illustrates the changes in LETA ridership between September 2005 and 2006 for the fixed route, demand response, and contract services.

In March 2006 there was a decline of over 60% in use of the fixed route, while the demand response/paratransit dropped by 30%. Contract services remained largely unaffected, but there was a slight decrease in the number of contracts. The reduction of fixed route riders was expected considering the change in routes, destinations, and decrease in buses. Phase II *LETA FY2007 Strategic Plan* is considering different options to improve the public transit operation that will satisfy the demands of the community for public transit as well as for a fiscally balanced operation.

The consultants, after realizing the decline of ridership, conducted surveys of current and previous riders and of five stakeholders to gather information on reduction of services and possible improvements. Many of the respondents indicated that LETA needed to change the fixed route, establish stable base funding, improve the image of the buses and management of the system, utilize better marketing, combine services with Tiger Transit, and increase access to low and moderate income areas. Carter-Burgess used the information to compose different models that would best benefit Auburn-Opelika and the county region as well as giving LRCOG options to choose from (Carter-Burgess 2007).

In January 2007, Mr. Rod Wilburn of Carter-Burgess gave LRCOG's executive board a presentation highlighting the options the company predicted would work for LETA, based on the feedback from local riders and on stakeholder's vision. The consultants also examined other university systems in metropolitan areas outside of Alabama where transit services combine university and city systems. Carter-Burgess also conducted a comparative study with other public transit systems within Alabama with similar density per square mile, typical demand response service that were reflective of the Auburn-Opelika system. They discovered that many of the smaller places only offered demand response service, but LETA had the highest expense per vehicle revenue mile among other peer systems.

The majority of LRCOGs executive members couldn't decide on which route option would be adequate for Auburn-Opelika. Many of the members wanted more options to choose from and asked the Carter-Burgess representative to recalculate the figures and represent. The executive board members had very different reasons why they think the transportation is not as adequate. According to Commissioner Lawrence the executive board “needs to examine the system and decide how they want it to work and take steps to make it happen.” Lawrence says that executive board members lack “vision” in establishing an adequate transit system for Auburn-Opelika. He also questioned the staff’s abilities to figure out why LETA hasn’t combined with Auburn’s Tiger Transit. Many of the executive members want a system that works efficiently and effectively for the citizens who need public transportation. Securing funding is a major issue, because the state contributes nothing towards public transit in Alabama the burden rest on local communities and the federal government.

Auburn’s mayor, Bill Ham, believes lack of funding is the major problem behind providing transit to the community. He has said repeatedly that he’s willing to increase the money for public transportation if the other two member governments would consider giving more. Other members of Auburn’s city council believe public transportation has not been a priority, which contributes to the poor system. Councilwoman Sheila Eckman says that LETA is mentioned among the council’s members only when city council reviews LRCOGs budget. Eckman believes the city has shifted their focus to economic building/capital and strayed away from public transportation issues.

Although ALDOT controls $500,000 federal funds available for public transportation in Lee, according to LRCOG staff local governments do not contribute the maximum amount of match money to allow LRCOG access to all the funding they could be receiving for LETA. Previous LRCOG member, Auburn city councilman Dowdell, believes that the city is too focused on attracting more commercial businesses rather than solving transportation issues. Ham informed fellow members that “we (LRCOG) can spend the time fixing the problem now or spend more money later”.

In April, Carter-Burgess released the cost analysis for the three options presented in January. After careful examination, the firm realized that the options presented were the best for LRCOG since they didn’t have a “vision” for LETA. Carter-Burgess presented LRCOG with a comparative assessment of the different service options. The firm laid out the different route services provided with each options, route descriptions, turnaround time of the service, daily times of the service; types of vehicles needed for the options, as well as the potential revenue opportunities of each option (see Table 2). Carter-Burgess broke down the different cost of the three services (Table 3). Again they provided the hours and vehicles used for LETA, as well as the cost per mile and hour and overall cost of each option.

Some members remained reserved in their opinions to decide which option would be the best decisions. Some of LRCOG’s previous employees consider this an example of how board members have become more responsive instead of proactive (Holt and DiMaggio 2006). There are some who were apprehensive in January about Option 3’s fully integrated demand response system. Option 3 demand response would include the cities’ paratransit service for the elderly and disabled citizens who desperately need public transit for medical reasons. The demand response would still cater to the service zones according to the current schedule. Residents who relied on the fixed route would be able the use the service without a medical excuse from the doctors. The hours would remain the same as the fixed route, but there are some downsides. The service would be first come first serve; LRCOG has the right to exclude anyone they want as a result. Like the paratransit citizens would have to schedule 24 hours in advance for the service. There would be more available vehicles with limited space, because they will switch from buses to vans.

Which option the council chooses will determine how much more they may need to put towards the service or if they will have extra money in case of a rainy day. Opelika, Auburn, Russell and Lee County contribute $92,000 annually towards LRCOGs operational cost of services they manage. Opelika and Auburn each operate on an annual budget between $50-60 million dollars and the funds they provide LRCOG isn't only for public transit, but rather for the funds are divided between employee salaries, AAA, comprehensive planning, insurance costs, and miscellaneous. The counties contribute the same $92,000 from smaller budgets.

Dowdell believes that if local municipalities donated more funding towards LRCOG than the organization could assist more residents in the community versus donating money to organizations that are not as beneficial. In the grand scheme of things Russell County only concern is that LETA continues, because it primarily means of public transportation for the elderly citizens in the community. There are two systems that operate in Russell County under the LRCOG umbrella.

The LETA system operates within the county region while Phenix City Express (PEX) operates only in Phenix City. When the two counties combined in the 1990s LRCOG received administrative cost for PEXs urban system, which differs from LETA because they provide service to rural areas. LRCOG managed the two systems totally different and their funding is separated. Both receive a majority of their funding from the federal government, but the amounts they receive are different. LETA funding is different for their rural and urban routes. The rural routes receive 80 percent of its operation, administrative costs, and capital from the federal government and local municipalities provide the 20 percent difference. The urban route receives 50 percent from federal sources and the rest from local municipalities.

The PEX system is linked to the Columbus MPO, which handles the everyday operations of the service. LRCOG handle the administrative costs of the PEX system. Since PEX is linked to the Columbus MPO it puts their population over the 200,000 limit and they don't receive operational cost from the federal government. A majority of their costs are paid upfront to LRCOG. Though Phenix City pays higher upfront cost their transit system they take in higher fare box revenue from the service. There are higher costs associated with the LETA system which does not exist with PEX. LETA receives more contract work than PEX because the AAA, which handles transportation costs for the senior centers, is LETA's biggest contractor. Since they handle provide service for Russell that cutes PEX out of the opportunity.

Area Agency on Aging (AAA)

Since the 1965 Older American's Act the United States government has provided funds to state agencies for aging citizen's nation-wide to carry out mandated services to the elderly. LRCOG began providing services for the elderly in 1976 when they were designated the administrator of the Nutrition Program. The following year they were designated to administrate the Area Agency on Aging which manages programs such as:

- Medicaid Waiver Program
- Senior Centers

- Home Delivered Meals
- Ombudsman and Legal Assistance
- Preventive Health
- Information, Outreach, and Referral
- SeniorRx Prescription Drug Program
- Alabama Cares
- Senior Works
- State Health Insurance Program (SHIP)
- Lee-Russell Aging Foundation(LRCOG 2006)

Agencies that administer programs for another agency usually are compensated for administrative costs. A majority of AAA administrative costs are included in core funding. The Medicaid Waiver program is fully State funded, and separately administered. The LRCOG executive director manages both programs and receives partial salary from the federal government and the other from the state. Both programs receive a certain amount annually in which they must manage according to the specifications of the state or federal guidelines. Unlike the Medicaid Waiver program, AAA is able to move their funding around from highest to lowest categories according to the needs of particular services. The Medicaid Waiver funding guidelines are very specific to how the money is to be spent. AAA is broken down in categories: A, B, C1 and C2 and funding for each based on a formula implemented by the federal government. Funding can move from A (administrative) to either B, C1or 2, but not in the opposite direction (Pinkard 2007).

The COGs ability to maintain the AAA under their umbrella initially was the "cash cow" or major source of revenue (Council Harris). Majority of the services are free to the elderly residents that LRCOG serve. The programs are managed and implemented by LRCOG, but are designed by the cities and counties that they serve. The money contributed from federal, state, and local government isn't enough to sustain the current services, because of rising cost and the growth of the aging population. LRCOGs staff has taken steps to get money through fundraisers, donation from churches and local residents, and grants for which they qualify. The LRCOG formed Lee-Russell Aging Foundation, a non-profit foundation with 501c3 status that hosts annual fundraisers (Salute to the Working World luncheon, Unforgettable Footsteps Memory Walk, and Festival of Wheels) to provide meals for the elderly. They have recently begun coordinating with other agencies that deliver meals to elderly, so they do not overlap and work to maximize the number of elderly citizens receive meals in both counties. Director Jackie Pinket realized that some elderly were receiving meals from both agencies, while there were still many who needed the meals that weren't receiving anything.

The Lee-Russell Aging Foundation assisted LRCOG host the appreciation lunches and dinners they hold annually for their volunteers. The proceeds from fundraisers make it possible for LRCOG, AAA, and the foundation to provide more meals from residents who need the service desperately.

The AAA also have their own group of social and case workers that work with only elderly citizens in Lee and Russell county. They assist clients with coordinating services for in-home house care so they do not have to move out of their homes. They also help those that need to be in nursing homes get the information they need. Many of the case workers have an average of 30 clients, which they try to visit once a month and keep up with their services. The senior Rx workers assist elderly individuals receive medication for free from 350 different pharmaceutical companies. A majority of pharmaceutical companies offer a limited supply of medication for free provided you fill out the forms in a timely manner. The Rx workers assist clients and the clients' personal physician in filling out the forms for the medication. They try to keep track of the deadlines and resubmission of the forms, because the companies supply in 90 day increments. The process usually takes 30 days to receive the medications, so the Rx workers usually try to get the paperwork filled out after 45-60 days so the clients doesn't have to be without medication. This program is fully state funded (Pinkard 2006).

The State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) is a federally-funded health advisory program that provides grants to all 50 states for health insurance counseling to Medicare recipients (SHIP 2007). The AAA's insurance program under LRCOG's program is designed to "provide older individuals with consumer education and counseling enabling them to understand Medicare, Medicaid, Long-Term Care Insurance as well as other health insurance options" (LRCOG 2007). Since the recent implementation of Medicare Part D there have been a vast number of insurance options that are offered to elderly citizens. The Medicare Part D federal program was introduced in 2006 through President Bush's legislative action to improve Medicare. In December 2003 Bush and the Republican Congress which developed and passed the Medicare Prescription Drug Improvement and Modernization Act, which stamped the 21st century impression on Medicare (Johns 2004).

The Act moved government operated Medicaid into a privatize insurance market (Lieberman 2006). The Medicare Part D program automatically switched millions of Medicaid/Medicare dual recipients and Medicaid recipients that formerly received benefits directly from Medicaid into the program (Mazza 2006). Since Medicare Part D's inception polls have indicated that 80 percent of enrollees are satisfied with their chosen plans granted they have not fallen in the senior drug cost trap. The gap occurs when a senior's drug costs reach $2,250. Over that amount they experience high out-of-pocket expenses, which researchers expect will happen to 3 to 4 million seniors within the next year. The seniors will be expected to pay full price for the drugs as well the drug-plan premiums (Montgomery and Lee 2006). Although there are high numbers of satisfied seniors, there remains a portion of them who are unhappy with the program. Their unhappiness is why State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) is vital to seniors and imperative to their cognitive understanding of insurance options.

The SHIP educators along with the Medicare wavier case workers organize and facilitate classes with the elderly of their respective communities every registration period. The elderly citizens have the option to make changes annually to their insurance according to what's going on with their health. Along with changing their insurance providers, clients that were originally Medicaid have the authority to change caseworkers at any given time and for any given reason either within LRCOG or the Health Department caseworkers. The Medicaid clients' ability to change organization and caseworkers at their leisure makes it difficult for either organization to keep an accurate account of their clients. The accurate count assessment allows them to know how many open-spaces they have to fill from their waitlist as well as other AAA organizations, because they all have access to each other open-space and waitlist. In recent times this has paid off for LRCOG's aging agency.

Last year LRCOG secured additional federal funding to reduce their senior waitlist. The high number of waitlisted seniors forced the state government to take action against the AAA agencies, because some were holding open-spaces and waitlists while holding onto the funds that are funneled from the federal government to state for the agencies. The state seized the all funding that wasn't being used from the AAA and gave all the AAA organizations the opportunities to use the funding adequately. The state informed the AAA agencies of the action they had taken and why, as well as how they could access the money and when it would be available. Mrs. Pinkett informed all the caseworkers about the state's action and her team began pulling the names on their waitlist as well as the surrounding AAA in their area. Individual AAA agencies like the state and federal government have access to all the others and are aware of how many people are waitlisted, open spaces available, and how many clients the agency is currently serving (Pinkard 2006).

The day funding became available Mrs. Pinkard and her team secured enough funding for their waitlist as well as additional clients from the surrounding agencies' waitlist. Because of their valid efforts in eliminating their waitlist and increasing their case load the AAA received an additional caseworker to handle the load. The AAA's hard work did not go without notice or consequences, as the following year the state attempted to cut their funding, because of their actions. LRCOG and the local AAA leaders went head to head with legislative representatives to obtain the funding that would be lost. In instances like this there are executive board members that question the

LRCOGs motives. Although the staff managed to provide for more clients and secure additional staff, not everyone was pleased. Mayor Gary Fuller worried that LRCOG "is more concerned with the amount staff they have working under them than the cause" and believes agrees with Probate Bill English "that LRCOG needs to work within their means like local governments".

Planning

In 1969 the Lee County local Charter became part of the COG system assisting with Planning within the region that was under the umbrella of the regional council. In the years since its existence many of the metropolitan areas have developed their own planning departments, which allow LRCOG to shift its attention to assisting more non-metropolitan areas. The planning department:

- Assists Lee and Russell Counties Emergency Management Agencies to develop Natural hazard Mitigation Plans, Homeland Security Assessments, grant applications and other special projects.
- Prepares regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Plans to be used as a guide for economic growth in Lee and Russell County.
- Develops a scenic byway inventory for Lee and Russell County (LRCOG 2006).

LRCOG has incorporated the assistance of Auburn University professors. Dr. Michael Clay of the School of Architecture has previous work experience with regional councils and has devised a model that takes more than economic growth patterns into account. His model considers the social ramification of building highways and housing development in low-income areas and identifies how this can undermine social capital.

The model allows for examination of traffic patterns and identifies how best to spend the money for transportation while considering the needs of those less fortunate.

The planning department works in collaboration with transportation planning and analyzes census data. The planning department not only provides this information and more to local, state, and federal government, but to commercial businessmen seeking new opportunities for growth. Business owners are looking for cities where conditions conducive to success are found. They seek the information from COGs because this enables them to get information without getting directly involved with potential cities until they make a decision. Companies look at the education levels of the workforce and take into consideration current and potential economic situation, highway access, education ranking of the schools, hospitals, and crimes rates.

Planning pays off for the communities which do not have the ability to conduct an annual study like Auburn and Opelika. Cities that possess their own planning department conduct majority the of the work the LRCOG would do, but for small communities in the county the COGs work is greatly valued. In the county, LRCOG's planning department along with grant writers has been instrumental in assisting local governments.

Such communities as Hurtsboro, Smiths Station and other small communities provide LRCOG with additional revenue ($801,117) as illustrated in Figure 3. The LRCOG provides grant writing services for other communities within their jurisdiction that are not members of the executive board. These communities do not receive the same benefits of full members LRCOG still will assist the smaller communities when they are needed. Funds that are contributed by these non-member governments are based on the programs or services provided.

In 2005 Congress decided to close and integrate a number of military bases. The Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission's (BRAC) goal is to "reorganize its installation infrastructure to more efficiently and effectively support its forces, increase operational readiness and facilitate the new ways of doing business" (BRAC 2007). LRCOG has been working with Russell County to get Fort Benning the information needed for their expanding army base. The military community located in Columbus boarders on both Russell County and Phenix City. LRCOG realized that with the closure and realignment of bases the massive influx of personal army and their families would require them to make sure there was adequate housing available on and off the base and employment opportunities for their civilian partners.

The extension of the army bases and flood of people will attract commercial and residential development to the region. The funds gained behind the army realignment may affect Lee County. Though local municipalities are excited about the growth some question the equal pay system established by LRCOG bylaws and would like to see some changes.

Mayor Fuller wants LRCOG to move towards a sliding scale payment system for dues like other regional councils. He believes that it would ensure equality among the local municipalities that utilized LRCOG services. Although he has not yet discussed this with his fellow members, he strongly believes that this would create equality among the member governments. The sliding scale would bring Smith Station, a fast growing city, into the system, instead of being allowed to avoid membership. Fuller is former business man an though he realizes that government is not out to make a profit he from man "would like to get the most for his money" and firmly believes that cities should operate as a business so they can achieve the best quality of life for their residents. This attitude may breed competition among local governments.

Competition

LRCOG provides communities with services that each specifies they need, because they don't have all the same needs. The staff treats local municipalities equal with no favorites, to aid in eliminating competition. The competition between Auburn and Opelika extends back many years, surrounding all aspects of life. The competition continues today is fueled by developers promoting housing and commercial development. Both mayors are involved in promoting economic growth.

Mayors Ham and Fuller have worked together to widen highway access ramps. They each sacrificed their individual funds from ALDOT for a year (Ham 2006). Because LRCOG has an MPO which acts as a clearinghouse, these negotiations are possible, because legally the mixing of cities funding with surrounding cities is illegal. They will form gentlemen agreements like this but to other situations that benefit both cities' interest.

There was no mention of conflict between Auburn-Opelika and Lee County, but there is a different story in Russell County. Thought Phenix City and Russell County share the same courthouse, competition exists between the two. Phenix City is located in Russell County they act as if they are independent of the county. Last year Phenix City had an altercation with Lee County, because they offered trash collection for residents outside their jurisdiction, which caused residents to be confused. The residents were supposed to be taking trash to Lee County trash collection area. When the trash collection was stopped the residents complained to both county governments to continue the service for their subdivision. Lee County offered to allow the residents to keep the service, but they would have to pay both Phenix City and Lee County.

Phenix City has been slowly annexing portions of the county where subdivisions have been built, which cuts down the influx of tax revenue for the county to support the remaining residents. The county is especially concerned since they have been working with LRCOG to complete the comprehensive plan for the BRAC. The county is concerned that too much annexation of their region will make it difficult for them to pay their portion of match money for the senior centers and grant writers that LRCOG provide.

Outside of the competition that exists between cities and counties there are other issues that effect the performance of LRCOG. In order for LRCOG to pass policies, majority of the executive board needs to be present. According to the bylaws LRCOG can only conduct business when there is a quorum. Last year the previous chairman brought up the attendance issue to encourage some other members to take the LRCOG seriously. Some members suggested that a sign-in sheet be kept to identify members who miss meetings. Once in their possession members wanted to use the sign-in sheet as documentation to present to that members local municipality they represent so they could hold them accountable to LRCOG and their purpose. They wanted to give the local municipalities the opportunity to address the issues. Some LRCOG executive members wanted frequently absent members to be replaced with members that were going to be committed to the work of LRCOG. Since meetings occur quarterly, LRCOG's inability to pass policies that affect the funding of programs can have serious repercussions, and prevent LRCOG staff from meeting the needs of the community. The executive members have keep a close eye on the problem, but they have granted the director executive, permission to sign reoccurring grants so there would not be any interruptions with services.

For many members, LRCOG’s ability to act on their behalf is appreciated, especially for grant funds that are routine. Others want to keep a close eye on LRCOG. Mayor Fuller is used to overseeing and managing the day-to-day operations of his city (Opelika) and realizes that people do get busy and one person can not do it all, but he tries to be kept abreast of developments at LRCOG.

VII. SOUTH CENTRAL ALABAMA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

In 1969, the Alabama Legislature passed Act No.1126 developing the Central Alabama Economic Development District. In 1971 Governor George Wallace split the regional planning organization into South Central Alabama Development Commission (SCDAC) and Central Alabama Regional Planning Development Commission (CARPDC). SCADC is the designated regional planning organization for region 5, which consists of seven counties: Bullock, Butler, Crenshaw, Lowndes, Macon, Montgomery, and Pike. The quasi- governmental organization provides “aging, planning, GIS, economic and community development services to the member governments” (ALARC 2006). The SCADC is governed by a 29 member board of directors which consists of four representatives from each county and an additional member-at-large that is elected annually on a rotating basis from county to county. It functions as a non-metropolitan regional planning commission with the exception of Montgomery County, which is also part of the Central Alabama Regional Planning Development Commission. According to SCADC bylaws, Montgomery does not receive full services from the regional council, but does receive Economic Development assistance under the 1965 Public Works and Economic Development Act (PWEDA).

The PWEDA grant is designed to improve the quality of life for citizens in urban and rural distressed communities. The funds are used to improve long-term employment opportunities, expansion or establishment of industrial or commercial plants or facilities, primarily to benefit the unemployed and low-income members of communities (ALARC 2007). The grant also provides funds for technical, research, training, and administrative costs of projects as long as the communities have done the planning.

The South Central Alabama Development Commission is divided into the professional staff and the Board of Directors. The professional staff handles all day-to-day administrative duties of SCDAC, which is managed by Tyson Howard, the executive director. The executive director acts as the chief administrative officer to the Commission and is responsible for hiring all staff, the planning and development of activities, programs and services according to the guidelines and policies established by the Board. The Executive Director also is responsible for establishing an efficient and effective organizational structure that would enable them to deliver services. The Executive Director is expected to prepare an annual budget, reports and publications as appropriate, administer policies approved and adopted by the Board, and recommend changes to the commission's personal policies.

The Executive Director is also expected to confer and consult with other public officials on behalf of the regional council in connection with programs and actives that they are involved in. The executive director and professional staff attend local meeting to get approval for their budget from the local municipalities, to inform them of local programs, grant opportunities, and changes made within the organization, and to prepare fiscal audits of projects, programs and activities of the Commission's books. The Executive Director and professional staff only make recommendations to the governing board, but they have no power over the decisions that are implemented (ALARC 2007).

A majority of the professional staff including the Executive Director have an advanced degree and years of experience working with other organizations. Many of the student interns working at SCADC are currently working on advanced degrees. The Board of Directors consists of elected and appointed officials and citizens. Each county is granted four seats, with three filled by the county chair, the mayor of the largest governing body, or mayors of the two largest municipalities, and at least one person that is not an elected official or employee of the local government.

The Board of Directors is responsible for adopting, amending, and repealing bylaws, rules and regulations that govern how they conduct business. They provide for administration of the organization, as well as for personnel policies. The board has the power to engaging in contracts, leases, and agreements that make it possible for them to carry out the objectives and purposes of the organization. The boards of directors/executive board are the decision-makers of SCADC (SCADC 2007). The directors are usually the representative of their local area and projects meets the needs of their constituents. They also speak to the local city council members to secure money on an annual basis for programs that are vital to their community.

Budget

The South Central Alabama Development Commission currently is operating on a $4 million budget. The majority of the funds are contributed by the Area Agency on Aging programs. The regional council receives other funds from local municipalities and contracts with other organizations. The federal government grants large amounts of funds for aging services. The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) was the primary “cash cow” for the organization for many years, which is why they have opted to operate it in-house.

SCADC's budget has slightly increased in the last five years, because of the rising number of elderly residents living longer (Harris 2006). Though the cost of managing the programs have risen funding to support these programs and SCADC have risen more slowly. The lack of funding has forced SCADC to look for alternative funding opportunities. SCADC has worked with other organization to provide better service for the elderly and provide other residents a better quality of life. The collaboration has saved the council money to achieve the greatest results for all parties involved.

On average SCADC spends a majority of the budget on AAA programs, supplemented by the federal government. There is large portion spent paying the staff which has decreased in size due to better opportunities provide by the federal governments' Homeland Security Department. Most counties under SCADC's umbrella are Black Belt where there is little money generated by the local communities. The lack of population means there is less money that will be paid to SCADC, since the dues are largely based according to the counties' population. Because they are poor, dues that counties are paying may not meet the match money required to manage programs, or provide Revolving Loan Funds for local businesses to stay afloat and employ local residents, or compete for highly qualified personnel so they work more efficiently. There are some communities within the desolate counties that fare better than others that could contribute more to SCADC, but refuse to do more than others who cannot. The members' unwillingness to contribute more money to SCADC is one of the ways they exercise power over the regional council, and restrict the services provided for their constituents.

Public Transit System

The South Central Alabama Development Commission does not provide a public transit system, because of the dispersed population within the counties. The city of Montgomery whose population exceeds the total population of the other six counties has a public transit system that is operated by a stand-alone Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which includes locally elected officials, an Alabama Department of Transportation representative (ALDOT), and Montgomery's Director of Planning and Development (Montgomery MPO 2007). The public transit that Montgomery provides is restricted to the city limits and an extended portion of the county covered by the MPO when providing fix-route transit.

SCADC is responsible for providing public transportation to elderly residents, which includes rides to and from senior centers, grocery stores, as well as doctor and dentist appointments. This is only form of transportation provided, using AAA funds through the SCADC. The SCADC has been instrumental in pushing for Rural Planning Organizations (RPO) in Alabama because many of the counties they represent are rural and it is difficult to operate a fixed route for a widely dispersed population. Having an RPO underneath SCADC's umbrella would bring in more federal and state funds for roads, to improve the rural counties' access to other places, as well as giving outsiders access to the culture of these rural areas. The RPO functions as its own agency within the SCDAC.

The formation of an RPO may bring awareness to the difficulties that many low-income residents face, due to lack of access. Though a majority of the funding will go towards local highways and roads, this would give outsiders access to rural beauty.

Building more roads could make these rural areas more attractive to commercial companies that would bring opportunity to attract retiring elderly, summer residents, and more real-estate investment. The commercial business would provide jobs and economic stability; this would lead to growth and maybe offset the brain-drain.

The SCADC realizes the benefits behind developing an RPO. They have recently taken the initiative to hold meetings within the local municipalities with major players in these communities such as: mayors, city council members, county commissioners, and local leaders of organizations. These meetings provide an opportunity to learn what RPOs are and what it means for their respective communities as well as an opportunity to address any questions and concerns of the local politicians and citizens.

Many of the local leaders in Bullock County attended SCADCs introductory RPO meeting. They attended because they were curious about the benefits of the RPO and they wanted to know what would change in Bullock County. They rejected the notion of SCADC conducting a transportation study, because they have not had good experiences with other organization’s research. The city and county officials expressed their frustration with organizations and universities that have conducted research within the county. Councilmen St. T. Thomas along with other county officials didn’t want to cooperate with SCDAC because they didn’t want the information gathered in Bullock to be used for surrounding counties’ benefit.

In spite of such resistance, the SCDAC has pushed forward with their “United We Ride” program. The United We Ride program focuses on creating a dialogue between the senior centers that SCADC manages with mental institutions, and other organization that assist disabled residents. The United We Ride program is designed to coordinate all the vans and buses used at these organizations, instead of each organization receiving money for transportation, the funds will be dispersed at SCDAC and refunneled. The program will make it convenient for the state and federal government to track the total amount of funding for vehicles, and have an accurate account of the maintenance and replacement needs. The funding saved could be used for Meals on Wheels program and to get more people off the Area Agency on Aging's list (SCADC 20007).

Area Agency on Aging (AAA)

The South Central Alabama Development Commission "administers a comprehensive Area Plan on Aging in Bullock, Butler, Crenshaw, Lowndes, and Pike Counties" (SCADC 2006). AAA funding comes from the federal and state government to maintain the senior centers, minivans that transport elderly residents back and forth to grocery stores, senior centers, and doctor appointments. The costs of programs have increased along with elderly population. Although SCADC provide a great deal of services for its residents, all services are not available in all counties. This is in part because some of the local communities insist on taking care of their senior residents.

Tuskegee manages all the day-to-day operation of the senior centers and transportation within the city limits. Though SCADC could assist Tuskegee with day to-day operations and other aspects of senior seniors, the city doesn't grasp the true understanding of how the council works. The city's interaction with the regional council has been shaped by the mayor. Until recently Tuskegee operated under a strong mayor government and so the mayor made all final decision. The city council members only offer advice, but the mayor had the final say and that has placed the city at a disadvantage, because they haven't utilized SCADC services for their community to their greatest benefit.

Tuskegee recently changed from strong a mayor to a city-manager government. This has given city council members more power over the decision being made within the community. They have hired city-manager Alfred Davis, a former Auburn employee, who understands how the relationship between regional council and city should work and is working hard to establish a more productive relationship. Before he can work towards building this relationship between the SCADC and Tuskegee he has to bring the city into the 21st century. Mr. Davis has provided technology classes and has taken up residency in Tuskegee to build trust with residents. Davis acknowledges that SCADC could do more than write grants for senior centers. He commends SCADC on the work that they have done for Tuskegee, because without their grant writing department working there would be an even greater challenge.

Planning

The South Central Alabama Development Commission's planning department provides its member governments with a wide range of planning services:

- The development of comprehensive, land use, and hazard mitigation plans
- The development of zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations
- The develop and maintenance of cartographic products and GIS services
- Redistricting services
- Environmental assessments
- The development of capital improvement plans and budgets
- The development of economic development strategies

- The development of feasibility studies for specific programs and projects (SCADC 2007).

Planning is a very important service that SCADC provides for the counties. Planning provides clear visual information about how lands being used in every area of their counties in respect to their communities. The plans provide information about a community's water and sewer services, water drainage, housing rehabilitation, recreation in the area, zoning and subdivision regulations, environmental assessments, and budget information relating to potential capital development. The SCADC also provides information which potential business investors' access from the SCADC website.

The zoning regulations came in the 1990s when Tuskegee's Mayor Johnny Ford was elected to the state legislature. The zoning regulations were one of the pieces of legislation that Ford was instrumental in promoting Macon County. Before the comprehensive zoning ordinance legislation was passed rural counties were vulnerable to invasion of landfills and other business like this setting up their area without their knowledge. Business like these would get permission from the county, without any regard for local citizens (Ford 2006). The legislature changed the type of business which could set up shop in the county or cities. Soon after that other counties obtained the zoning regulations for their counties.

The zoning regulations provide clear information for potential business investors and local businessman. The information can help them to determine what things about their community they should highlight to attract economic developers. The planning services are offered to all member governments, but some representative's ability to capitalize on their community's history, hunting, or other attractions can lead to competition among counties.

Competition

The strife that exists between the counties under the SCADC exists because some members believe that others are receiving special treatment or that the COG staff has hindered their attendance. Although many of the local officials that I interviewed had great things to say about SCADC, there always is an exception to the rule. One reason for some tension between counties is that some do not qualify equally for grant funding from such organizations as Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). According to SCADC the grant money they receive from ARC are used only for Macon County, and like most grants they have guidelines that the council has to abide by.

Macon County not only has to worry about competition from other counties, but there is also internal strife. The county opened a new hospital because it was hard for residents to make it to Auburn and Montgomery so they built one closer in the region. They receive state funding and additional funding from different grants (observation). Mayor Ford suggested that the county allow Tuskegee to occupy part of the empty portion of the building and they could split the cost since they wanted to replace the hospital that closed years ago at Tuskegee University. Ford figured that working together would be better than working separately since many residents lack private insurance and many depend on Medicaid (Ford 2006). Though Ford has big plans for Tuskegee he realizes they have limited funding resources, and he has conflicting views than his city-manager Mr. Davis. Davis, a long time employee of Auburn City realizes that the only way for Tuskegee to have a hospital would be for it to be a joint effort, because all the

Medicaid patients would cause the hospital and the city to be broke. He fully supports sharing the burden with Macon County; because Davis realizes that hospital depend on patients to pay their bills. Since Davis is not from Tuskegee he takes an objective opinion on issues within the community and he tries to keep the city on budget and on the road to recouping all the things they have lost.

Local officials within the same city often have differences of opinion. Union Springs' part-time Mayor Earl Hinson and former only African-American Mayor and current city council member John McGowan would agree that SCADC works with the senior center and that coordination of transportation is excellent (McGowan and Hines 2006). The SCADC grant writers have been heavily involved with assisting Union Springs with projects in the community such as the new swimming pool which replaced the pool they cemented up and closed for many years after some young African-American boy swam in the pool on a hot summer day.

Bullock County's Commission Chair, Ronald Smith, agreed that SCADC has done great work in Union Springs and the county, but believes they could do better. Smith believes the council shows favoritism towards those areas that are productive. Smith admits that he has not regularly attended SCADC meetings, because of a particular professional staff member. Smith and other representatives he's appointed to SCADC says that she is abrasive and does not seemed to be committed to SCADC's mission. Smith questions why she has been employed at the organization for so long, because he believes that her attitude is apparent and that he is not the only one who thinks this way. As an organization he believes that they are "full of shit" (Smith 2006). Smith says he has mistrust for SCADC and does not really understand, outside of work with the elderly, what they do and how they are beneficial.

There is a difference in perception even within SCADC among the directors. Howard believes that the member governments work well together when it comes to issues that are joint between them, and that this has improved since he started working there seven years ago. According to Howard, prior to his arrival the SCADC was in jeopardy and many of the other regional councils worried that SCADC would close. Howard had previous work experience with Montgomery before agreeing to work at SCADC. Howard says that he could complain about the funding, but he realizes that until the economic development improves in many of the governing communities there will be less money coming in from that end. He recognizes that the state and federal government want more things to be done, but there is lack of funding from either, because they spend money on other programs that they believe are more important than the COGs mission. Howard believes in the current Iraq war, but thinks that many of the cuts are because of the money that Bush is spending on fighting the war and the support their giving to the local people at the same time. The state is spending a great deal of money on workforce training. Howard expressed great concern that maybe funding for the workforce and the state is having less money to give, because their getting less money filtered to them by the federal government. Though Stacey Webb, SCADC Economic Development Director would agree with Howard, that the lack of funding from federal and state are part of the problem as well as the lack of capital that the local governments are able to contribute.

Webb believes that the reason that things do not get done is because there is tension between counties about who is getting what and why SCADC is getting projects in a particular part of the region and not others. Webb says that behind the issues within the counties are interfering with leadership ability to provide opportunities for their communities. Some members are missing deadlines for applying to funds for projects that they want for the communities and sometimes they do not miss the deadlines, but there is internal strife between the local leaders and their communities. While there are some member governments who make deadlines and have less conflict with leadership, communities, and other cities and are able to seize the opportunities.

The other problem is that, unlike AAA grants, administrative costs in economic development grants generally are funded by that particular project. Economic development is not restricted to particular services like the AAA which has particular programs they have to offer to all areas, due to federal guidelines handed down with funding. A majority of the grants that they seek are ones that the members have asked them to seek on their behalf. Sometimes they look at other grant opportunities for the members and present them to them to see if any member is interested. There is no set fee that SCADC charges, instead they use a sliding scale like they do for their fees. The smaller the grant the more it cost the member government.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have compared two councils of governments in Alabama, the Lee-Russell Council of Governments (LRCOG) and the South Central Alabama Development Commission (SCADC). The two share functional similarities but differ importantly due to the nature of the communities they represent and the relationships between the Councils and those communities.

The COGS are similar in the services that they offer the communities that they serve. They usually receive majority funding from the same state and federal sources and follow the same guidelines when hiring professional staff for their individual organizations. Each of the individual COGs post job openings on the website that is shared by all the Alabama regional councils.

The COGs relationship with their respective communities differs because of the local communities' understanding. The LRCOG offers a wider range of services to the governing executive board and their communities than does the SCADC because of the latter organization's limited funds provided by state, federal and local governments. The executive board members of the LRCOG understand the role they and the professional staff of the regional council play. The executive members realize they are public representatives of LRCOG and are partially responsible for gaining acceptance from local municipalities. They know problems with elderly, transportation, and planning are regional issues and although there are some communities have the financial resources to deal with some of the issues, they understand that working collectively with other communities suffering from the same issues benefits all. Although some board members question the leadership of the organization, they believe the staff is committed to LRCOG and citizens. They put aside their difference to achieve the greater good for other communities.

The lack of funding from local communities prevents the SCADC from offering all services in all areas of their jurisdiction. There are some flourishing communities that contribute their fair share according to the pay scale of SCADC, but not are willing to contribute more. Those communities are the same ones that receive less funding, because they are doing well, while other communities receive more funding because they are poor; this generates some rivalry between counties and between municipalities within the same county. Some communities have a limited understanding of SCADC's role and question the professional staff's abilities to treat the communities equally and fairly.

The character of each COG is shaped by the needs and resources of the member governments and by the interests of the executive board members who represent these governments. A majority of all executive members want economic development and improved transportation for their individual communities, which results in the potential for competition among board members. The ability for communities to produce economic development would create employment, commercial and residential development to create stable communities and decrease the brain drain.

Though communities of LRCOG are competitive with each other when it comes to regional issues they put their difference aside for the greater good of the whole. Within the LRCOG there is no competition between Auburn and Opelika or neither of them with the county. There is competition between Lee and Russell County, and between Russell and Phenix City. The competition is over land, because the city is annexing subdivisions into the city limits, which is taking revenue dollars from the county.

The SCADC faces some of these same issues with the communities they serve. The communities would rather fight each other rather than work together. For instance Macon is the only county that receives funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and they were the first rural area to control zoning regulations. Macon not only has competition from other counties, but conflict with local municipalities (Tuskegee) within its boarders.

Councils of government depend on both member governments and state and federal governments for funding for organizational overhead and program funding. Councils of government have particular responsibility for public transportation, programs for the aging, and planning. They also support member governments in preparing grants to federal and state agencies for other activities. Leaders of successful Councils need to be able to keep happy officials of local, state, and federal governments, and do so without independent resources.

COGs are intermediary organizations that have little or no authoritative power over local, state, and federal governments that finance their existence. The federal government provides a majority of COG funding and has tightened regulations as to how the money is to be utilized. The state also imposes tight restrictions on the funding that it contributes. Programs that COGs oversee are done according to the rules set by other governmental units. The financial contribution of municipal and counties governments is minor in comparison to either federal or state governments, but they are represented on the governing body that oversees the council and approves the council's budget. The COGs have no authoritative power and have no recourse against member governments. The only power the Councils have is that federal laws specify Councils must be formed to handle certain functions.

The COGS are essential actors in handling the coordination of regional programs but have little power. The COGs have limited scope for innovation of programs because many programs are mandated according to federal and state grants guidelines. The transportation and aging programs have strict regulations which COGs are mandated to follow. The COGs have more wiggle room in the planning department, because they are able to suggest innovative ideas to the member governments. The planning department is where planning, research, and grant writing all converge. COGs are able to suggest different grants that are being offered for particular purpose, but at no time do they have the power to implement any suggestions without the authority of the executive board members. A majority of the projects and grants written are based on executive board member interest. COGs are fundamentally service organizations.

COGs are an organizational form designed to increase both vertical and horizontal communication and cooperation between all levels of government. Because COGs oversee federal and state programs on a local level they make it possible to cross the boundaries of most bureaucracies. The nature of bureaucracies is defined by boundaries that follow a chain of command and control over human and material resources. The COGs work to break down these boundaries presented by bureaucracies in order to affect positive change in communities. The regional councils are the only organization that allows local municipalities to work collectively with financial resources to resolve regional issues that affect their communities. The bonds that are formed from working together generate trust and social capital in these communities.

Although COGs have become the intermediary between local, state and federal governments, they get their best results when they channel all their efforts together. The COGs have their umbrella organization, the Alabama Association of Regional Councils (AARC). The AARC speaks on behalf of the interest of member councils, because the individual COGs have limited ability to press local or state governments to take particular action; collectively the AARC carries more weight. The AARC has managed to secure funds for Revolving Loan Funding (RLF) and aging programs. They arrange one-on-one meetings with various state committees and officials for the AARC to plead their case for funding.

COGs facilitate communication between organizations. The mutual exchange of beneficial information and resources across all government entities generates bridging social capital which COGs use to embed themselves in the local communities they represent. Their ability to embed themselves in local communities makes it hard to destroy the organization and gives them the opportunity to develop the “we” instead of “I” of local communities. They provide a forum for member governments who were once strangers to create a social network, because of their constant interaction. They generate solutions for their shared problems, which has been their common ground. The COGs’ ability to create a place where these communities can resolve regional problems builds trust among the members of COGs.

The COGs push to improve service programs for the benefit of disadvantage groups sometimes generates tension. For instance LRCOG has fought local municipalities to keep the public transit system. This creates opportunities for powerless members of the community. It is necessary for LRCOG to fight for these social programs because they are on the forefront of understanding issues of the powerless. Sometimes the COGs give voice to the powerless citizens of the community, and if they did not fight for these social programs there would be many who would suffer. There are programs that theoretically should work according to design but may not apply to people in these practical situations in real life. Since COGs are on the front line they address these issues they evaluate ineffective programs and work to get federal and state government to modify so they work as intended.

Trust is a key ingredient in building social capital which in turn allows COGs to break down the boundaries of bureaucracies and allows informal relationships to form that make organizations cohesive. Though some of LRCOG's executive members question the leadership of the organization, they have complete confidence in the work of the professional staff. The members respect each other's opinions and generally have a personal rapport with other members outside of the organization.

When there is lack of trust between local municipalities and the COGs, it is difficult to generate information between horizontal and vertical organizations. Some politicians within SCADCs jurisdiction are distrustful of outside organizations and sometimes they become suspicious of SCADC and question the work that they do. This kind of distrust breakdown the cohesion of the organization and could ultimately limit effectiveness of the COG.

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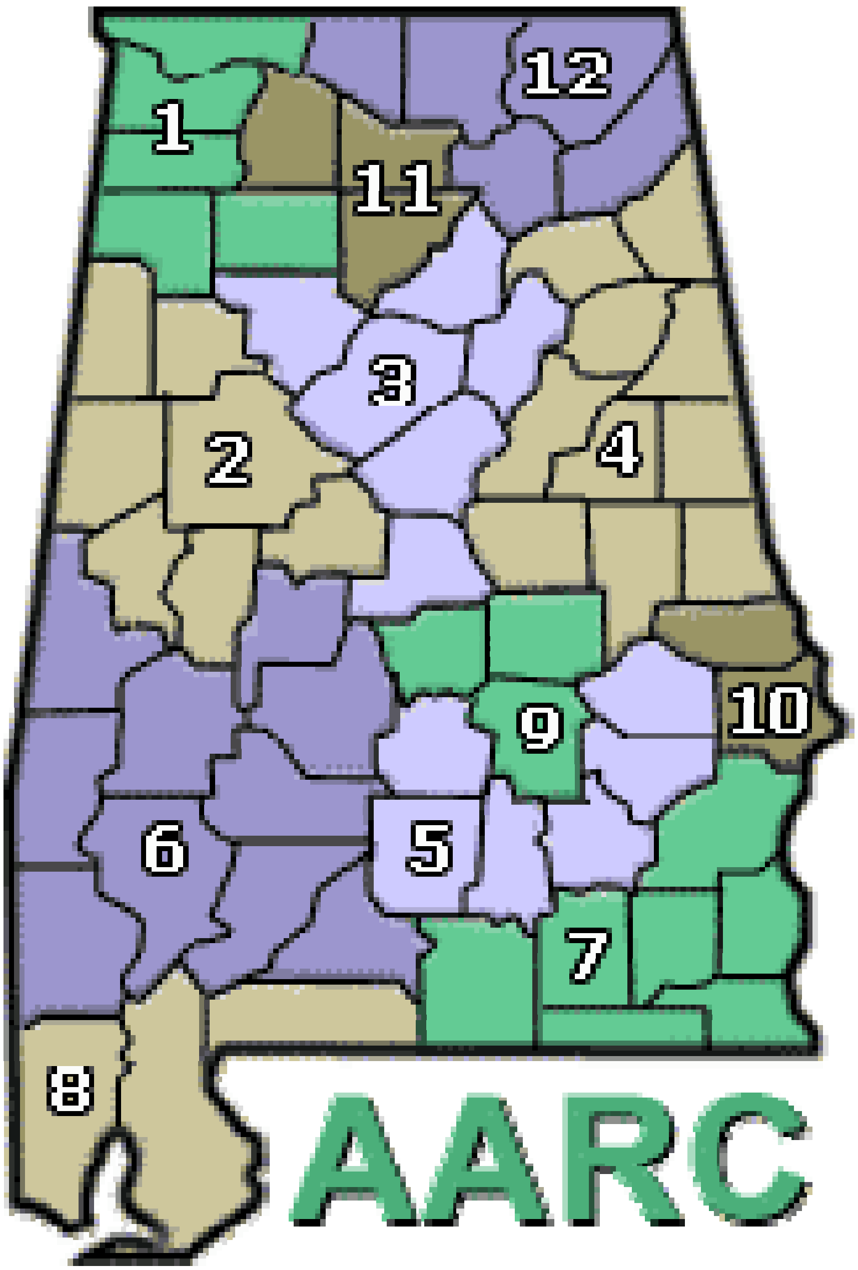
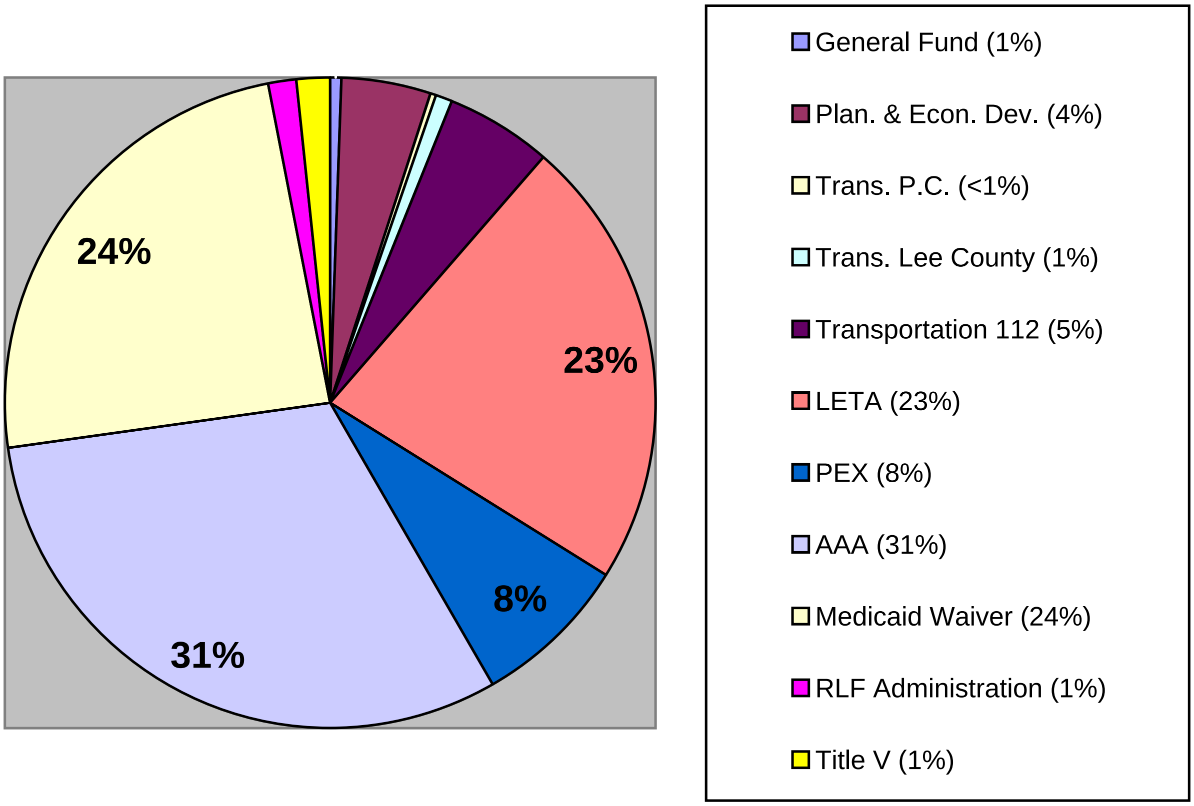
Figure 1 Twelve Regional Councils of Governments in Alabama



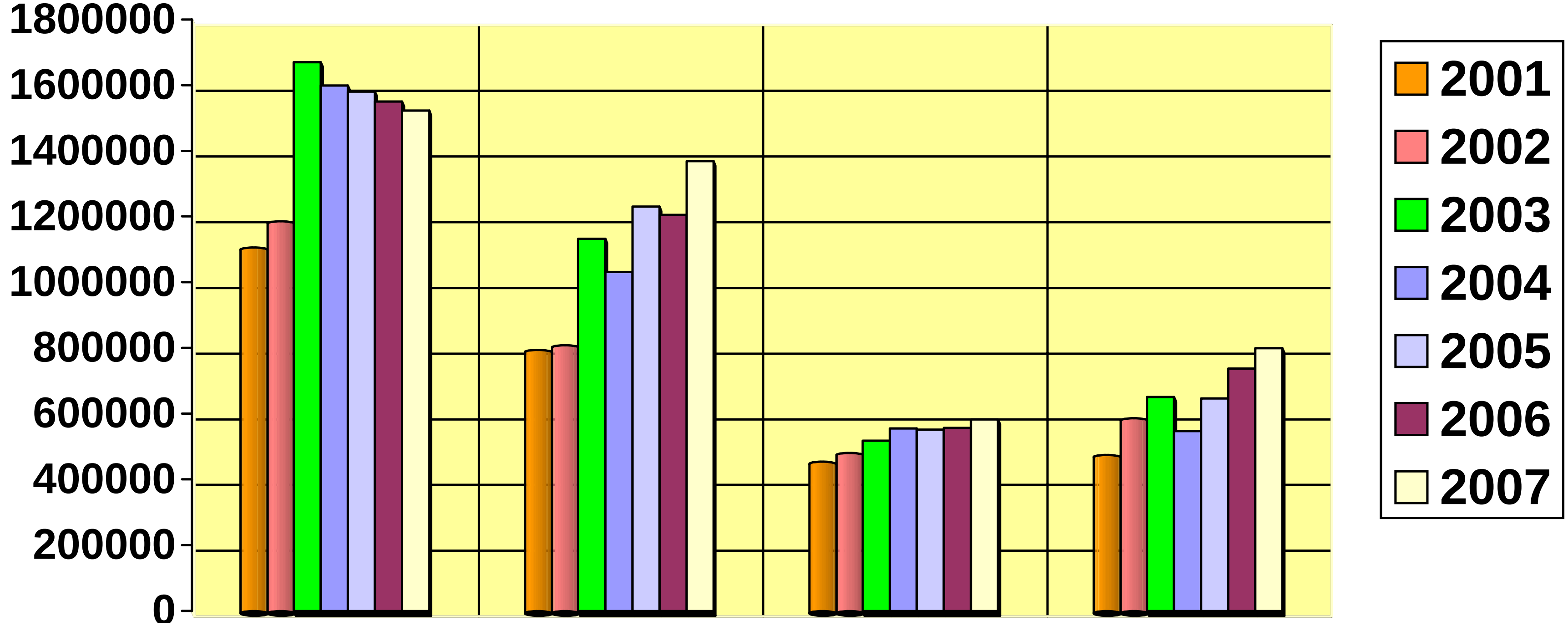
Source: Alabama Regional Council of Governments (AARC)

Figure 2 LRCOG expenditures by department, Fiscal Year 2007



Source: Lee-Russell Council of Governments 2007

Figure 3 Revenue Sources by Categories



	Federal Funds	State Funds	Local Gov't Funds	Other Local Funds
2007	$1,523,888	$1,370,374	$583,981	$801,117

Source: Lee-Russell Council of Governments 2007

Figure 4 External Forces on Councils of Governments (COG)

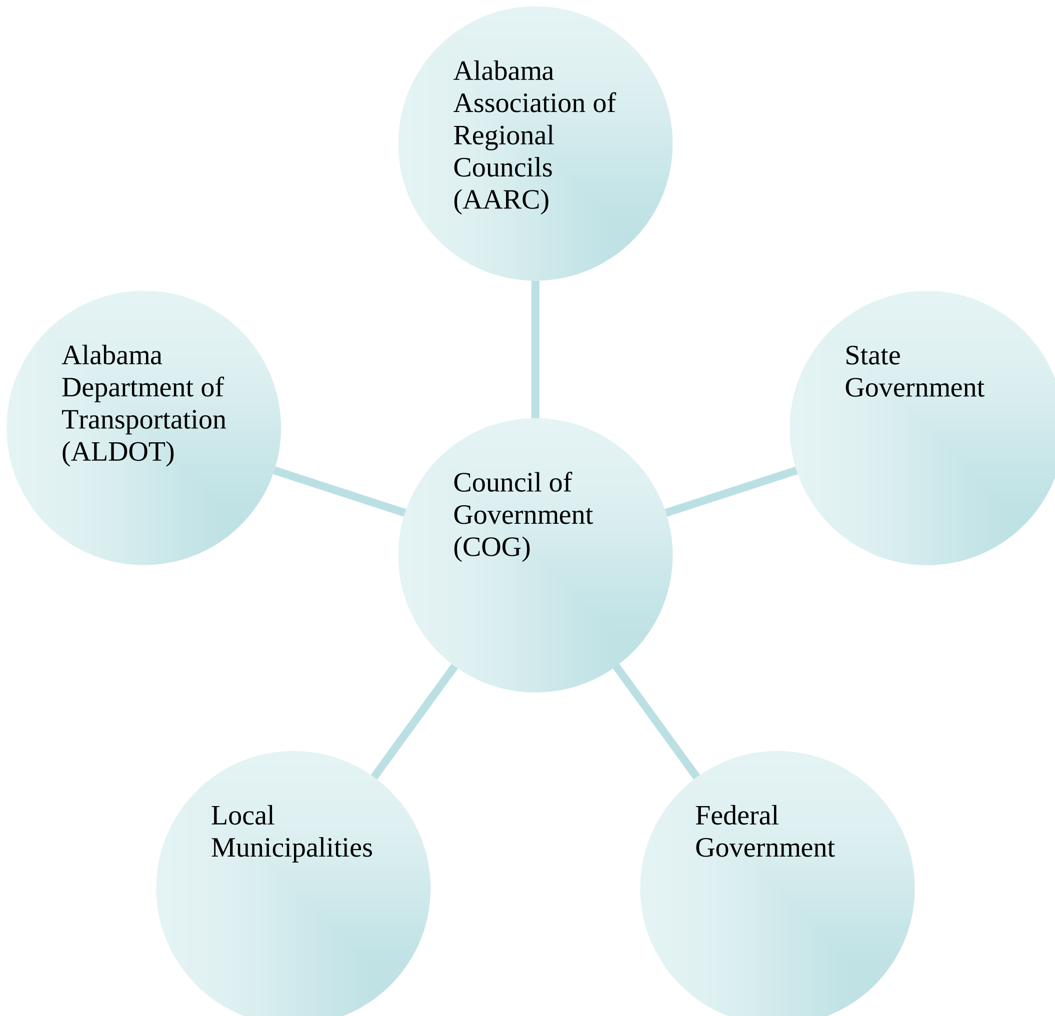


Table 1 Lee County Transit Agency Ridership Changes by Type of Service

Type of Service	Number of Riders	
	Sept. 2005	Sept. 2006
Fixed Route	4,357	1,632
Demand Response / Paratransit	1,339	922
Contract Services	2,300	2,249

Source: Carter-Burgess Firm/Lee-Russell Council of Governments 2007

Table 2 Service Options Assessment for Lee County Transit Agency

Service Element	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Current Service
Route	Fixed route service (28-mile route length)	Fixed route express bus service (9-mile route length)	Demand response service only	Fixed route service (28-mile route length)
Route Description	Two-way route between Wal-Mart in Auburn and Jeter at Raintree in Opelika	Two-way route from downtown Auburn to Samford at Alice in Opelika	24-hour advance call-in reservation	Two-way route between Wal-Mart in Auburn and Jeter at Raintree in Opelika
Headways	1 hour	1 hour	n/a	2 hours
Vehicles Needed for Regular Daily Service	4 vehicles for fixed route; 8-10 vehicles for paratransit/ demand response	2 vehicles for fixed route; 10-12 vehicles for paratransit and feeder demand response	12-15 vehicles for demand response	2 vehicles for fixed route; 8-10 vehicles for paratransit/ demand response
Hours of Revenue Service	Monday-Friday 6:00AM-6:00PM (10 two-way runs)	Express service Monday-Friday 6:00AM-6:00PM (express service); service reverts to demand response between peak hours	Monday-Friday 6:00AM-6:00PM	Monday-Friday 6:00AM-6:00PM (5 two-way runs)

Source: Carter-Burgess Firm/Lee-Russell Councils of Governments 2007

Table 3 Option Comparison for Lee County Transit Agency

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Fixed Route Service			
Description and Assumptions	Same route with improved headways; requires doubling number of buses, miles and hours	Express bus service from downtown Auburn to downtown Opelika	
Route Length		8.7 miles one-way	
Service Hours	Mon-Fri, 12 hours	Mon-Fri, 12 hours	
Headway	1 hour	1 hour	
Vehicles	4 buses	2 buses	
Total Miles per Year	219,078	75,849	
Total Hours per Year	15,326	9,231	
Cost per Mile[1]	$194,979.42	$67,505.61	
Cost per Hour[2]	$302,995.02	$182,496.87	
Total Cost	$497,974.44	$250,002.48	
Demand Response Service			
Description and Assumptions	Paratransit demand response service; remains unchanged	Paratransit demand response service in Auburn and Opelika feeds express bus route; same level as current with different service pattern; 20% increase in number of vehicles, miles and hours of service; requires additional 2-3 vans	Combined demand response and paratransit service county-wide; no fixed route service; operates the same number of miles and hours of service as provided by fixed route service; requires additional 4-5 vans
Service Hours	Mon-Fri, 12 hours	Mon-Fri, 12 hours	Mon-Fri, 12 hours
Vehicles	8-10 vehicles	10-12 vehicles	13-16 vehicles
Total Miles per Year	127,506	179,494	188,000
Total Hours per Year	6,967	9,876	13,290
Cost per Mile[1]	$113,480.34	$159,749.66	$167,320.00
Cost per Hour[2]	$137,737.59	$195,248.52	$262,743.30
Total Cost	$251,217.93	$354,998.18	$430,363.30
Rural Demand Response Service			

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Description and Assumptions	Remains the same; service to select zones on specific days of the week	Remains the same; service to select zones on specific days of the week	Remains the same; service to select zones on specific days of the week
Total Miles per Year	13,428	13,428	13,428
Total Hours per Year	494	494	494
Cost per Mile[1]	$11,950.92	$11,950.92	$11,950.92
Cost per Hour[2]	$9,766.38	$9,766.38	$9,766.38
Total Cost	$21,717.30	$21,717.30	$21,717.30
combined Public Transit Total			
System Scheduling	$0	$30,000.00	$70,000.00
Total Cost	$770,909.67	$656,717.96	$522,080.60

[1] Cost per mile is $0.89
[2] Cost per hour is $19.77
NOTE: All options assume contract services remain the same. Contracts revenue of $275,638 covers the cost of contract operations. LETA charges $28.88 per hour and $0.89 per mile for providing premium services.
Source: Carter-Burgess Firm/Lee-Russell Councils of Governments 2007

Table 4   Interview List of City Council and Regional Council Members

Names	Affiliation	Date
Bill Ham	Mayor of Auburn	January 12, 2007
Gary Fuller	Mayor of Opelika	January 19, 2006
Earl Hinson	Mayor of Union Springs	March 14, 2007
Johnny Ford	Mayor of Tuskegee	January 25, 2007
Bill English	Lee County Probate Commissioner	April 21, 2007
Arthur Dowdell	Auburn City Council	December 2006
Sheila Eckman	Auburn City Council	January 11, 2007
Clarence Harris	Opelika City Council	December 2006
Tom Worden	Auburn City Council	January 18, 2007
Charlotte Ward	Former Auburn City Council	December 19, 2006
John Harris	Lee County Commission and Former Opelika City Council	January 25, 2007
JD Upshaw	Russell County Commissioner	April 21, 2007
Lutalo Aryee	Tuskegee City Council	March 22, 2007
Johnny Lawrence	Lee County Commissioner	January 25, 2007
Ronald Smith	County Commissioner Chair	April 21, 2007
Consuella Harper		February 22, 2007
Alfred Davis	Tuskegee City Manager	February 22, 2007
John McGowan	Union Springs City Council and Former Mayor of Union Springs	March 7, 2007
Saint T Thomas	Union Springs City Council	March 22, 2007
Doc McGowan	Bullock County Commissioner	March 22, 2007
Larry Lee		October 30, 2006
Bill Curtis	Executive Director of East Alabama Regional Planning Development Commission	November 15, 2006
Keith Jones	Executive Director of Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments	November 8, 2007
Suzanne Burnette	Executive Director of Lee-Russell Council of Governments (LRCOG)	December 6, 2006
Tyson Howard	Executive Director of South Central Alabama Development Commission (SCADC)	February 22, 2007

Jim Youngquist	Fanning Institute	October 25, 2006
Lisa Sandt	Planning and Economic Director at LRCOG	December 6, 2006
Van Vanoy	Finance Director at LRCOG	December 6, 2006
Jackie Pinkard	AAA Director at LRCOG	December 6, 2006
Luther Holt	Former Executive Director of LRCOG	December 7, 2007
Sandy DiMaggio	Former Executive Director of LRCOG	December 19, 2006
Stacey Webb	Planning and Economic Development Director of SCADC	February 22, 2007
Jesse Turner	Transportation Planning Director of Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments	March 15, 2007
Barbara Yarbrough	Transit Administrator of LRCOG	December 19, 2007
Barbara Scott	Planning and Economic Development of LRCOG	December 19, 2007
Lu Stand	CAC Member	October 25, 2006
Michael Eastman	Former Employee of East Alabama Regional Planning Development Commission	October 29, 2006
Commissioner Epps	Russell County Commissioner	January 31, 2007
George Tabb	Bullock County Extension Agent	April 21, 2007

Table 5 Interview Script

1. How long have you held the appointed or elected position?
2. Are you a member of the local COGs Executive Board?
    a. And if so how long?
3. What have been the benefits of being a member of the regional council of governments?
4. Do you believe that the COG has been effective in meeting regional needs of the community (public transportation, area agency on aging, planning)?
5. Would your community be able to secure the same programs (public transportation, area agency on aging, planning) without being a member of the COG?
6. What challenges or obstacles do you see that COGs may be presented with in securing (public transportation, area agency on aging, planning) programs for your community?
7. In what ways do you think the COG could improve?