

Chapter I

METROPOLITAN NEEDS AND GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Great cities have given way to metropolitan areas as the centers of American life. To many observers, the emergence of the modern metropolis is a cause for concern as much as for celebration. Metropolitan development confronts, and helps to create, a long agenda of problems that can be solved only by public action. The agenda includes providing public investments and services to keep pace with population growth and changing needs, rebuilding the older urban centers, eliminating the inequities of social and economic segregation, and offering equal opportunities for all to share in the benefits of urban life.

This array of urban problems has been widely recognized but subject to varying interpretation. A fundamental issue, whether governments are capable of dealing with these problems, is often slighted. Thus social critics, noting the contrast between splendid new suburban homes, an abundance of high-powered cars, and recurrent crises in such areas of public responsibility as education and water supply, conclude that there is a striking imbalance in national priorities. Galbraith, in *The Affluent Society*, attributes this curious urban blend of private splendor and public squalor to a national folklore that assigns high value to private production, with a corresponding neglect of important public investments. If the American public assigned higher priority to government undertakings, presumably government would respond with vastly improved programs.

While public attitudes are surely important factors influencing government performance, a more searching examination of the state of public business in metropolitan America will reveal that the organization of government also has much to do with current inadequacies. Even where demands for improvement are voiced loudly and persistently, governments in urban areas often seem unable to hear or to respond. To meet the needs of a metropolitan age, it is essential to remove obstacles within the system of government itself. Efforts to arouse public awareness and concern for urban problems are unlikely to produce tangible results unless there are channels for transmitting this concern to government, and unless government is equipped to take effective action in response.

This book is concerned with the metropolitan areas of the United States, the problems posed by their rapid development today, and the disabilities that prevent governments from coping effectively with these problems. Numerous books and articles have been devoted to this subject, reflecting many points of view and different levels of research and analysis. Since 1959, the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations has conducted a number of studies focusing on governmental responsibilities and performance in urban areas.