Intergovernmental agreements are useful in broadening the geographic base for planning and administering governmental services and controls. By enlarging the scale of administration, they make it possible to lower unit costs. Further, the boundaries are flexible and can be enlarged without difficulty when additional governments want to join an agreement. Where agreements are used to extend city services to developing fringe areas, they may be helpful in guiding orderly metropolitan growth.

A basic weakness of joint agreements is that they are practical only when the immediate local interest of each community receiving service is not in conflict with the interest of the government responsible for providing it. Yet in providing areawide services such as public transportation or water supply, conflicts are likely to arise over the location of facilities or priorities for investment. Since agreements are voluntary, each community in effect has veto power within its own borders and can withdraw when its interests are affected adversely by decisions concerning areawide services. Intergovernmental agreements are thus not suited to effective decisionmaking on issues which transcend local interests; under a system of agreements such issues would require unanimity among the governments involved rather than decision by majority vote.

On issues that are more local in character, intergovernmental agreements may interfere with the citizens' ability to take part in making policy. Even though individual governments retain their freedom to pull out of an agreement, and thus retain ultimate control over their own policies, the weaving of a network of intergovernmental agreements tends to confuse the lines of actual responsibility to the point where effective local control may be seriously eroded. Further, the tendency is for each agreement to be made on an ad hoc basis for a particular need, so that the complete view is never brought into focus, making it more difficult to coordinate services and achieve a balance of needs and resources.

Intergovernmental contracts may be objectionable on other grounds where the seller municipality has a virtual monopoly on the service. If one community controls the water supply in an area, for example, only its own self-restraint protects the purchasing communities from being exploited on price and service. Where monopoly conditions exist, some outside authority is needed to protect the purchasers—a role performed in some States by utility regulatory bodies that review water contracts.

### 3. VOLUNTARY METROPOLITAN COUNCILS

Metropolitan councils are voluntary associations of elected public officials from most or all of the governments of a metropolitan area, formed "to seek a better understanding among the governments and officials in the area, to develop a consensus regarding metropolitan needs, and to promote coordinated action in solving their problems."[8] In effect, they are intergovernmental agreements for joint conduct of activities in research, planning, and deliberations on issues of areawide concern. They are not, however, identical with metropolitan planning agencies, which will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

[8] Samuel Humes, "Organization for Metropolitan Cooperation," *Public Management*, XLIV (May 1962), p. 106.