



*Petra Todorovich is director of America 2050 at Regional Plan Association in New York City. America 2050 is a national urban planning initiative to develop an infrastructure plan and a compelling vision for America's future growth. Todorovich oversees the research and advocacy program in partnership with organizations such as the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and the Rockefeller Foundation. She has written articles on transportation and infrastructure policy, and is a frequent speaker on the topics of transportation policy, megaregions, and national planning.*

*Prior to the launch of America 2050, Todorovich directed Regional Plan Association's Region's Core program and coordinated the Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York, a network of organizations that formed shortly after 9/11 to promote the rebuilding of the World Trade Center site and Lower Manhattan. She planned numerous public forums and workshops, including the 2002 "Listening to the City" meetings at the Javits Center that brought more than 4,500 people together to consider plans for the World Trade Center site. She authored the 2004 Civic Assessment of the Lower Manhattan Planning Process and other pieces of analysis on the rebuilding process and New York City development.*

*Todorovich received a B.A. from Vassar College and a Master in City and Regional Planning from Rutgers University. Contact: [petra@RPA.org](mailto:petra@RPA.org)*

## Petra Todorovich

**LAND LINES:** *In what capacity do you work with the Lincoln Institute?*

**PETRA TODOROVICH:** I direct the America 2050 initiative, a joint venture of the Lincoln Institute and Regional Plan Association, to develop a national infrastructure plan and growth strategy for United States in the twenty-first century. This program got off the ground in 2005, thanks to the support of the Lincoln Institute for an initial two-day workshop on national planning. We have worked closely ever since to expand the program and advance recommendations for federal policy reform on infrastructure and planning issues.

Since the initial workshop in 2005, I have planned a spring research seminar every year with Lincoln to develop new insights for America 2050. Several of these focused on the changing spatial development patterns of the United States and emerging megaregions. We've brought together a variety of U.S. and international scholars to explore case studies of megaregions in Texas, the Midwest, California, China, and Western Europe, as well as the underlying economic functions that link these places together. This research has laid the foundation for greater recognition of megaregions as an important scale for infrastructure planning and policy making, particularly in the area of transportation.

During the last year, America 2050 has operated a "Rebuilding and Renewing America" campaign, focused on the need to create and implement a national infrastructure plan. We have convened large forums on infrastructure in Washington, DC and a half dozen megaregions across the country to build support for megaregion collaboration and coalition-building on issues such as transportation, water resources, and energy infrastructure.

**LAND LINES:** *What kind of support is there for megaregion planning and collaboration?*

**PETRA TODOROVICH:** The greatest interest seems to arise when there's money on the table. In other words, if adjacent metropolitan regions see that they will fare better in securing federal funding if they work in concert instead of at odds, they will collaborate. But if there's no financial incentive, it is difficult to force cooperation. The flip side is that the leaders in a megaregion recognize a threat that must be resolved through cooperation and joint action. But so far, financial incentives seem to work best.

**LAND LINES:** *Can you describe some examples?*

**PETRA TODOROVICH:** As part of my work at Regional Plan Association, we've convened a coalition in the northeast megaregion of business groups and leaders called the Business Alliance for Northeast Mobility. The Business Alliance came together to address the deterioration of the physical infrastructure and service on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, which extends from Boston to Washington, DC. We recognized that one state could not fix the problems on the corridor alone—it requires joint planning and investments by Amtrak and as many as 12 different states.

As a result of this group's work and many other efforts, in October 2008 President Bush signed the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, which authorized increased funding to Amtrak and the states for passenger rail services. Interestingly, this was the legislation used in the recent stimulus bill to appropriate \$8 billion in funding for high-speed rail. So we are now seeing the impact of our work foster megaregion cooperation in a different way.

**LAND LINES:** *Can you explain that impact further?*

**PETRA TODOROVICH:** I think we will see more and more megaregion planning and cooperation in the process of competing for high-speed rail grant funding. This leads to my other example. This summer, the mayors of Atlanta, Charlotte, and a handful of smaller cities in the Southeast held a summit of infrastructure priorities in the Piedmont Atlantic megaregion, as a follow-up to our America 2050 forum in Atlanta held earlier in the spring. The mayors discussed a variety of issues, but made clear that high-speed rail between their cities was a top priority and that they planned to work together moving forward to make it a reality. If the federal high-speed rail program really takes off, which we hope it will, it

should motivate a lot of similar megaregion-scale collaborations. Without planning and collaboration at that scale, it will be difficult to implement high-speed rail successfully.

**LAND LINES:** *One of the goals of America 2050 is to develop a national infrastructure plan. How do you envision that taking place and what should be the role of the regions?*

**PETRA TODOROVICH:** Ideally a national infrastructure plan should converge near the middle of the top-down federal and bottom-up regional planning spectrum. The federal government should provide goals and guidance for infrastructure planning, and the regions need to identify their major infrastructure priorities, and work together at the megaregion scale when needed.

The reason for holding megaregion forums around the country was in fact to get this process started. We recognize that there is a very limited role for the federal government in local planning matters, but when you start to talk about systems that span multiple regions, whether it be high-speed rail, protecting a watershed, or controlling sprawl in border regions between metropolitan areas, the federal government can support multi-state or megaregion-scale cooperation. Better yet, those regions can work together themselves to make plans, identify priorities, and cooperate, and then seek federal support for their priorities. In this way, we've been thinking of megaregions as building blocks to a national plan.

**LAND LINES:** *What are the critical needs and promising opportunities for infrastructure development in transport, water, and energy?*

**PETRA TODOROVICH:** Since each of these areas of infrastructure is vast, and there is no shortage of needs or new opportunities, we narrowed our focus to the aspects of infrastructure that are national or megaregional in scale. In transportation, we think it's time that the federal government prepare and implement a national transportation plan as ambitious and transformative as the interstate highway system. The need for a truly national-scale transportation network that goes beyond automobile travel is driven by the projections of a 40 percent

increase in America's population by 2050 and the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent in the same period.

We're calling for a Trans-American Network of high-speed rail powered by renewables, electrified freight corridors, a plan to "green" our nation's seaports, and improvements to technology and intermodal connections. Most of the investments are likely to take place in the megaregions, where more than 70 percent of the nation's population and jobs are located today, and thus will require megaregion-scale coordination.

In water infrastructure, our approach is driven by the scale of watersheds and estuaries, which span political boundaries and require megaregion-scale planning. America 2050 is developing recommendations for a systems approach to water resource management, which relies on distributed, multi-purpose solutions for greater efficiency, reduction of non-point source pollution, and natural filtration (though storm swales and rain gardens). In addition to the need for landscape and watershed-scale cooperation, these new strategies will require supportive federal policies.

In energy, there is a real need to invest in the electricity grid and make the transition to the Smart Grid, which integrates transmission with broadband technology, to allow for real-time pricing and demand management. Grid planning again requires collaboration among multiple stakeholders over vast areas and the cooperation of the federal government. Bringing people together to identify common problems or opportunities is an important part of our work.

**LAND LINES:** *How do these infrastructure strategies and regional plans support larger national goals, such as rebuilding an inclusive economy and protecting the environment?*

**PETRA TODOROVICH:** That's important. We're not just promoting infrastructure investment for its own sake. The megaregion plans and sectoral strategies are a prerequisite to America's success in this century. If we don't make adequate infrastructure investments, we are certain to fall behind the economic rise of our global competitors, like China and India. If we don't make *smart* infrastructure investments

that address the climate change challenge head-on, we put the entire planet at risk.

**LAND LINES:** *How will a national strategy address these concerns?*

**PETRA TODOROVICH:** Our most recent RPA-Lincoln research seminar focused on one critical aspect of a national strategy: the need to address underperforming regions and places. Our research identified 640 counties in the nation (about 20 percent of U.S. counties, but just 5 percent of the population) that have not kept pace with national trends of population, employment, and wages. Many of these are formerly resource-based economies that have not been able to make the transition to a service- or knowledge-based economy.

As we begin to emerge from the current recession, and assuming a continued rise in energy prices and international wages, the country needs to plot a course for the future of large industrial or rural regions, including the Midwest, the Great Plains, the Mississippi Delta, and the Gulf Coast, as well as older industrial cities and inner suburbs with high levels of unemployment. A national infrastructure and growth strategy must address the role these regions and places can play in transitioning to a low-carbon economy. This will require massive investment in the design, production, and installation of renewable energy and efficiency components, storage, and transmission. This type of strategy should have a more lasting legacy than the recent \$85 billion bailout for the automobile industry.

**LAND LINES:** *What's next for America 2050?*

**PETRA TODOROVICH:** The Lincoln Institute and Regional Plan Association are hosting an America 2050 National Leadership meeting in Washington, DC in October that will bring together our key partners from around the country to report on progress in the megaregions and review our policy recommendations and legislative strategies. Lincoln is also supporting a major research project that I will be working on with my colleagues at RPA on the economic development opportunities associated with high-speed rail investment in the megaregions. **L**