Resilient Regions

Brookings Metro
25 YEARS OF IMPACT
Climate resilience and economic inclusion are two of today’s greatest imperatives facing public officials, private-sector leaders, and their civic partners. Yet decisionmakers are paying too little attention to how our current built environment restricts progress toward these goals. Housing, land use, and infrastructure policies have distorted market forces and created unsustainable development patterns, contributing to unaffordable housing, ever-growing trip distances, overconsumption of natural resources, and the rising financial and human toll of climate catastrophe. People of color and low-income households disproportionately bear the costs of these problems, reinforcing longstanding economic inequalities and climate injustices.

Creating more resilient and inclusive regions will require leaders to address two critical challenges. First, markets for land, infrastructure, and natural resources do not accurately price the social and environmental costs of development. For instance, relatively low gas taxes and the absence of congestion fees hide the social and environmental costs of driving and sprawling development. Second, fragmented local governance impedes coordinated land development. While jobs, housing, and transportation all operate at a regional scale, policies that most directly regulate these markets are primarily the domain of local governments. Because these two structural failures both deeply interrelate and vary greatly in their magnitude across the country, successfully addressing them demands an interdisciplinary approach, a persistent focus on political economy, and a commitment to advancing incremental but meaningful changes that combat economic exclusion and foster more sustainable development patterns.

“Our new partnership with Brookings Metro through the San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center is transformational for the San Diego region. Having access to the deep expertise of Brookings Metro scholars – on a wide range of issues from housing affordability and broadband access to climate resilience – and insight into federal policymaking is invaluable as we look to make generational investments in building more equitable and resilient infrastructure and communities.”

SUSAN GUINN
Chief Innovation Officer of The San Diego Foundation and President & CEO of the San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center
Opportunity for Impact

Leaders in America’s metropolitan areas, and their partners in state and federal government, need a new approach to the built environment that channels economic growth and regional coordination toward more equitable and resilient outcomes. Emerging practices like Columbia, S.C.’s green bond, Minneapolis’ zoning reforms, and congestion fees in dozens of global cities demonstrate the potential of innovative regional action. Meanwhile, the federal government is making generational investments in U.S. infrastructure that create new opportunities for innovation and collaboration. Regional leaders now need better information about effective solutions for their communities, and new venues in which to connect multi-sector stakeholders and local/state/federal policymakers to co-design interventions, road-test pilot programs, and scale effective solutions.

Brookings Metro’s Resilient Regions Initiative will serve as a unique knowledge and action hub to study, design, test, and scale new approaches in regional land use, transportation, housing, and infrastructure policy and practice that can produce more inclusive and resilient places. Unlike existing efforts that focus on specific sets of economic, environmental, or governance issues related to the built environment, the Resilient Regions Initiative will both diagnose the interconnected challenges and work in partnership with places to address them.

The Resilient Regions Initiative will deliver impact through three key activities:

• **Platform-setting research** on economic, finance, and governance issues that helps leaders at all levels understand the need for market-driven, regional policy responses to the twin imperatives of climate resilience and economic inclusion.

• **Local solutions** co-designed with public, private, and civic-sector leaders for financing and governing water, digital infrastructure, affordable housing, and transportation systems, recognizing unique city-level political and institutional contexts. Brookings Metro is piloting these solutions in San Diego and is seeking at least one more focus region for the initiative.

• **Policy exchange** via workshops involving federal and local leaders to inform implementation of historic federal infrastructure investment to advance the goals of competitive, inclusive, and resilient regions.

The Resilient Regions Initiative will provide timely insights and practical recommendations for policymakers; private-sector leaders in real estate, infrastructure systems, and finance; and civic organizations focused on fighting climate change and building an inclusive economy. Ultimately, it will help shape modernized urban governance and pricing policies that improve the competitiveness of metropolitan areas, increase economic and racial equity, and slow the pace of climate change.
As Brookings Metro celebrates 25 years of impact, we are prioritizing collaborations with America’s local leaders around five signature initiatives that address the most urgent challenges facing our country. These initiatives—Inclusive Innovation and Talent Development; Resilient Regions; Transformative Placemaking; Valuing Black Assets; and Worker Pay and Power—combine original research insights, active problem-solving with local leaders, and venues for spreading and scaling change that ultimately help every community in our nation to be more prosperous, just, and resilient, no matter its starting point.

In the years ahead, Brookings Metro will evolve in two important ways to deliver on our renewed, affirmative vision. We will double down on action, advancing local collaborations that drive larger change. And we will be explicit about our values, using the Brookings platform to better represent the diverse experiences and perspectives of the communities and leaders we serve. It is a vision we hope to achieve in partnership with you and a network of local leaders. Please join us in supporting this important work.