



GATEWAY CITIES

COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Gateway Cities COG History

The Gateway Cities Council of Governments (COG) was formed in 1996, bringing together 27 member cities, along with unincorporated communities in three Supervisorial Districts within Southeast Los Angeles County. The Joint Powers Agreement creating the COG was signed by each of the member jurisdictions on September 23, 1996. According to the Agreement, “The goal and intent of the Council is one of voluntary cooperation among cities for the collective benefit of cities in Southeast Los Angeles County.”

The earliest city to incorporate in what is now the Gateway Cities region was Compton in 1888. Long Beach followed in 1897, and ten more would incorporate by 1927. There were no more incorporations until after World War II, when the Southeast area of Los Angeles County “exploded in growth,” to quote the first President of the COG, Doug Drummond.

The mid-1950s were a time of freeway expansion, driven by federal investment in the interstate highway system. In the decade between 1954 and 1964, the remaining fifteen cities in the COG region incorporated (see Table below). Because state law required cities to provide police services, these cities pioneered the “contract city” model, signing agreements with the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department to ensure public safety. These cities also contracted with other county departments and agencies to provide a wide range of municipal services. The City of Lakewood was the first “contract city” in 1954.

As early as the 1980s, city managers were gathering for regular monthly breakfast meetings under the banner of “Southeast Los Angeles Cities” or SELAC. As early as 1990, SELAC elected officials were also meeting monthly for dinner and camaraderie. The locations and host cities rotated around the region. All 27 cities were active in both these groups.

In the 1990’s, Congress began to recognize the value of local planning, but did not want to deal with funding hundreds of cities. Federal transportation legislation thus made substantial funds available to COGs for transportation and air quality planning at the regional level.

By the mid-1990’s, SELAC officials began to realize two things: first, other jurisdictions in Southern California were pointing to conditions in Southeast Los Angeles County to scoop up funding, especially for transportation projects that rightfully should have come into the region; and second, other Councils of Government were beginning to form around them, including in the South Bay and the Inland Empire.



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The city managers also received a request from various western states and local governments to send someone to represent the subregion to a planning meeting organized by the Federal Highway Administration in Sedona, Arizona, where various administrative structures were discussed. The city managers sent Richard Powers, recently retired as the City Manager of Norwalk. He returned with the knowledge that there was money for air quality, transportation, housing, and economic development planning available from the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) and the state if the cities formed a subregional organization.

A Carson City Councilmember, Gil Smith, contacted Downey City Manager Gerald Caton and other city managers to ask why the Southeast cities were so slow to organize. Understanding that the SELAC cities now needed to band together, four leaders stepped forward to organize a COG, which they called the Gateway Cities COG. They were Doug Drummond, then a Long Beach City Councilmember; Pat West, then Paramount City Manager; Gerald Caton; and Richard Powers.

Through a series of meetings, as well as the use of a persuasive video depicting the aging infrastructure, visible crime, and acute needs of the region¹, this small group built consensus among their colleagues for the creation of a Joint Powers Authority. With a COG in place, they argued, regional agencies centered in downtown Los Angeles could not set policies without hearing the voice of the two million residents of the Gateway Cities.

Richard Powers agreed to serve as the first Executive Director of the Gateway Cities COG. He would continue in this role for over twenty years, until his retirement in 2017. Doug Drummond agreed to serve as the COG's first President. Other city officials appreciated Long Beach's willingness not only to participate, but also to lead. An early concern was that sales tax revenue pooling among cities was being discussed in Sacramento. At the COG's first meeting, President Drummond introduced a motion stating that sales tax would remain within the city where it was collected. It was approved unanimously, and the COG was off to a great start.

During the COG's first three formative years, the City of Downey housed the COG offices and provide secretarial support at no cost. Likewise, at no expense to the COG, the City of Cerritos hosted its monthly meetings and provided a light dinner to all attendees.

In line with the federal funding priorities, the COG quickly established four policy priorities: Transportation, Air Quality, Housing, and Economic Development. As Executive Director Powers would always emphasize, the COG was most effective when working from a position of

¹ This video cannot be located.



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consensus, and these policy priorities were areas where the cities had strong common interests. A standing Transportation Committee was created in 1999, as provided in the COG bylaws. Early COG projects included developing a demographic portfolio that cities could use for grant funding, a study to address truck-impacted intersections, and a voucher program for heavy-duty diesel truck engine retrofits.

The COG staff initially consisted of just its Executive Director. Funding was provided through the payment of city dues assessments, which were tailored to the cities' ability to pay. Gradually an administrative assistant and a deputy Executive Director were added to the staff; later a transportation deputy for the COG's Metro Board member and an additional administrative assistant were hired. To limit the financial burden on member cities, the concept of having only impacted cities, like those along the I-710 corridor, pay for project consultants was adopted. In 2006 the Port of Long Beach joined the COG.

In 2004, the COG office was established in the Clearwater Building, a property in the Paramount Civic Center that is owned by the City, where it remains to this day. COG Board meetings are held in these offices. The building was built by George Atkinson, an attorney who represented many local businesses, using Georgia brick. According to legend, Oliver North – whom Atkinson had befriended while arguing cases before the U.S. Supreme Court – would occasionally come to Paramount and use an office in the southwest corner of building.

Under the current Executive Director, Nancy Pfeffer, who started in 2018, the COG office has grown to include an administrative team of three, and a small group of employees and contractors who support member jurisdictions in each of the COG's policy priority areas. Funding sources have diversified to include state and County programs (e.g., transportation, housing, energy, homelessness) and grants as well as member dues.

The tradition of monthly dinner meetings for the elected officials can be seen today as the COG Board members gather at the Clearwater Building before Board meetings. The City Managers' breakfast meetings also continue. In this way, the practices of today honor the traditions of the past in the Gateway Cities of Southeast Los Angeles County.



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Incorporation of Gateway Cities of Southeast Los Angeles County in Two Distinct Periods

City	Incorporation Year
Compton	1888
Long Beach	1897
Whittier	1898
Vernon	1905
Huntington Park	1906
Avalon	1913
Montebello	1920
Lynwood	1921
South Gate	1923
Signal Hill	1924
Maywood	1924
Bell	1927
Lakewood	1954
Downey	1956
Cerritos	1956
Bell Gardens	1957
Industry	1957
Norwalk	1957
Santa Fe Springs	1957
Paramount	1957
Pico Rivera	1958
Artesia	1959
Commerce	1960
Cudahy	1960
La Mirada	1960
Bellflower	1961
Hawaiian Gardens	1964