



A CALL TO ACTION

AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
PREPARED BY

FOCUS ST. LOUIS

JUNE 1997



FOCUS St. Louis challenges the region to discuss, debate, and work toward implementing the goals of *The Peirce Report*, a candid study of the St. Louis region's assets and liabilities. The report was conducted by urban experts Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson. St. Louis was the 14th U.S. city to commission such a study. FOCUS St. Louis, as the region's citizens league and leadership training organization, recognizes the value of *The Peirce Report* and provides this executive summary to make highlights of the report more accessible to the people and organizations of this region whose responsibility it is to implement this report.

REGIONAL CONCERNS

"Our impression is that this region, hauled up on the couch every quarter-century or so, tells analysts it isn't doing so great, and then lapses back into inaction."

- Extraordinary population loss in central city
- Overall population loss in region
- Loss of corporate headquarters
- High crime pockets
- Deteriorating neighborhoods
- Lack of infrastructure investment
- Below average graduation rates (high school, college, and graduate)
- Ill-prepared work force
- Fragmented government
- Racial disparity greater than other regions
- Uncontrolled sprawl (not accompanied by population growth)
- Perceived "top-down" leadership structure; lack of strong civic debate
- Behind U.S. standards in reinvented government and community development

REGIONAL ASSETS

"St. Louis needs a 21st-century civic strategy to match the physical triumph of its great Arch on the Mississippi. If St. Louis' problems could be solved merely by hiring consultants with bright ideas, that would have happened already. What's required is a radical shift."

- The country's greatest inland port
- Diverse industrial base
- Globally potent corporations
- Academically renowned universities
- Strong presence of fine arts
- Reputation as one of "America's most livable places"
- Strong sports presence
- Overall low crime rates
- Reasonably priced housing
- Recent significant job growth
- Strong regional business/economic development groups
- Rising collaborative spirit (i.e., the St. Louis 2004 movement)

OBSERVATIONS OF THE REGION

"Look St. Louisans in the eye. Ask them if they live in one of the dynamic, cutting-edge urban regions of the late 20th century. Very rarely does one get a 'yes'."

- Allowing St. Louis city to decline "is like dropping the sails on your flagship. It means the whole fleet slows down."
- The regional economy shows signs of "growing vulnerability."
- The region consistently wins when it cooperates and consistently loses when it is divided.
- St. Louis has the potential to be "North America's most imaginative laboratory for successful 21st-century metropolitan life."



STRENGTHS ON WHICH TO BUILD

"St. Louis could lead the nation in civic experimentation. It could study the very best ideas of other regions and adapt them for use here. The soil is more fertile for such an audacious effort than you might imagine."

- Expand Metrolink (the brightest among regional stars)
- Expand the mission and authority of regional organizations (e.g., Bi-State, East-West Gateway, FOCUS St. Louis, and St. Louis 2004)
- Cooperate on financing regional interests, in the model of the Zoo-Museum Tax District
- Experiment with worker-employer programs, such as the Regional Jobs Initiative, to build social as well as economic strength
- Demand greater state support, since this region is Missouri's "cash cow"
- Secure federal empowerment zone status through St. Louis/East St. Louis collaboration

BEST PRACTICES TO ADOPT

"Here's the vision: adopt a Best Practices Model. Smart corporations are constantly seeking out best practices among their competitors—indeed they must, to assure their survival in a harshly competitive world marketplace. Smart communities, interested in their survival, must now do the same."

- The newspaper needs to be a tool for systemic collaboration
- Involve the universities ("underused treasure") in regional collaborations
- Involve neighborhood and grass roots groups in "thoughtful collaboration"
- Let "New Urbanism"—planning plus values—guide land use
- Pursue best practices and learn from mistakes

RECOMMENDATIONS

"There's no reason why this historic bistate region of 2.5 million people should not become a vibrant, successful 21st-century community."

Create Goals:

Pursue the four E's—strong economy, healthy environment, social equality, and civic engagement (in other words, act as one unit with shared interests—what Peirce and Johnson call a "citistate"—a region consisting of a historic central city surrounded by cities and towns that have a shared identification, function as a single zone for trade, commerce and communication, and are characterized by social, economic and environmental interdependence).

Develop an Attitude:

Look to the future (2004) rather than the past (1904); strive for excellence rather than mediocrity; replace unilateral decision-making with collaborative decision-making.

Excel at Education:

Make bold changes; divorce policy-makers from service providers (especially in urban schools); arrange for excellence (enable charter schools, reward schools that perform, consider contracting-out teaching); school boards are "buyers" (not purveyors) of education.

Improve Race Relations:

Address racial concerns directly (without pretense); use faith communities as integration/interaction vehicles; make a conscious decision (as a neighborhood, town, etc.) to improve race relations; cover legitimate news stories that can have a positive effect on race relations; target youth for good race relations by dialogue and more importantly by "doing"; increase dialogue programs (like FOCUS' Bridges) a thousand times.



RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

- Reduce Crime:** Expand community policing (including neighborhood substations); adopt “zero-tolerance” policies toward minor crime to prevent major crime; provide swift justice (especially for youth crime); consider the coordination of many small law enforcement agencies in the region; address the reintegration of released prisoners back into the community.
- Provide Job Training:** Prepare for real jobs in a world economy; combine academics and career skills (a local best-practice is the St. Louis Career Academy); coordinate the many job programs to move in the same direction; address cultural barriers which hinder employment (especially among urban core youth); remove the unmerited stigma of technical education.
- Revitalize Downtown:** Define Downtown as “common ground” and “collective turf” for the whole region; make Downtown lively (e.g., “experience-based retail” and street art); create an *aura* of cleanliness and safety (going beyond just being clean and safe); issue challenges to regional players (e.g., challenge real estate brokers to find tenants for Downtown space, challenge leaders to streamline the permit process, and challenge citizens to commit to visit Downtown monthly); have a well-led organization to guide Downtown.
- Stabilize Neighborhoods:** Involve neighborhood organizations in housing and economic activity (SLACO is a good start); restructure public housing (St. Louis has some good models); break neighborhood revitalization away from the political system; utilize the expertise and resources of national housing finance/training intermediaries; create a credible business-authenticated support structure.

“By 2004, make the St. Louis region the Best Practices capital of America, based on a culture of learning, risk taking, and conscious striving for improvement.”

ABOUT FOCUS ST. LOUIS

FOCUS St. Louis is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose members share a vision and a commitment to work together to improve the St. Louis region as a place to live and work. The vision of the organization is to transform the St. Louis region by developing citizen leaders, stimulating citizen involvement, and mobilizing diverse interests to act regionally on critical issues. FOCUS St. Louis strengthens the St. Louis region by:

- Attracting and developing citizens for active involvement and leadership roles in regional decision making.
- Facilitating alliances to foster inclusive and collaborative action for the region.
- Developing solutions that produce visible change.

