

**Opening Remarks**  
**MARC Executive Director David Warm**  
**June 25, 2010**

Good afternoon. On behalf of all of us at MARC, I am pleased to welcome you today and thank you for the work you do every day on behalf of the Kansas City region.

The theme of this year's meeting is *A Thriving Region*. This theme reflects the ambition we share to create and live in a place that is truly flourishing. It reminds us that even in this challenging time — a time characterized by turbulence, uncertainty and retrenchment — we need to reaffirm our goal to become an even more vital and prosperous regional community.

In these times, our civic impulse is to focus on merely surviving — on making painful decisions about where to pull in and how to pull through. Tough times indeed bring tough choices, but they also bring opportunity — opportunity to reassess, to retool and to return to our vision of a thriving, sustainable region characterized by the vigor of our economy, the health of our environment and the strength of our social fabric.

When we focus on survival, we are defensive and protective; we give priority to the near term; we diminish our capacity to cultivate the ideas and opportunities essential for long-term success. But when we organize around a shared vision of a thriving region, we naturally focus on possibilities and aspirations; we explore the avenues for collaboration — we position ourselves and invest in our capacity to prosper.

From my perspective, Greater Kansas City is well on its way to becoming a thriving region. The reality is that we have incredible physical, economic and civic assets, and we are increasingly adopting a mindset and executing strategies that

use our strengths as a foundation for action. And our respect for the complexity of our region has not impeded our ability to think boldly and act positively about our common vision of sustainability.

The Mid-America Regional Council plays a central role in this process. MARC creates a way for the leaders of our region, those of you in this room today and many others, to come together to work in active, productive partnerships. The work you do through MARC is just that—it is the work you do. It is your ambition, your ideas, your spirit of cooperation that fuels our progress as a region.

I want to highlight some of your ideas and efforts that are helping position our region for a thriving future. Along the way, I hope to convey that this region is indeed pursuing an increasingly clear and coherent strategy to be a thriving, sustainable region.

Last year, in fact, the MARC Board of Directors adopted a strategic framework to move toward a vision for Greater Kansas City as a sustainable region that increases the vitality of our society, economy and environment for current residents and future generations. This vision of sustainability speaks to the health of our communities in the broadest sense of the term. It embraces every aspect of our lives — it has as much to do with public health and public safety as it does public works and public schools — and our strategies in all of these policy areas must reinforce and support one another. As a result, over the past year or more, we have been actively using this framework to integrate the various program goals and strategies at MARC to advance these core principles of sustainability and to align them with plans and strategies at the local level as well with initiatives of other regional leadership groups.

Here are some of the key goals and strategies in MARC's program areas that are positioning us to become a thriving, sustainable region.

We are building up **Strong, Productive Families** including comprehensive support systems to serve an expanding older population

Over the last decade, the Commission on Aging has built on its foundation of basic services — nutrition, transportation and in-home health care — adding more community-oriented services such as ombudsmen in long-term care facilities, mental health and self-advocacy programs, resources for family caregivers and elder abuse prevention initiatives. It is now addressing the new realities of a rapidly changing society, including supporting older adults who raise their grandchildren, helping seniors manage chronic diseases, and exploring new housing concepts and mobility services to support a rapidly expanding senior population.

- An exceptional system of early education centered on quality improvement and child outcomes

At the core of the region's early education strategy is a star rating system to advance and communicate the quality of programs. The system is supported by both public and philanthropic resources; it is backed by research on child outcomes and advanced through quality improvement initiatives like center director credentialing, teacher training and facility improvements. This quality strategy is best reflected in Mid-America Head Start, a partnership that serves some 3,100 children and their families and has been designated to apply for new investment as one of a handful of Centers of Excellence.

- Cooperative initiatives to broaden health care access and care coordination

Philanthropic leadership has also prompted important strategies to improve health care access among the poor and uninsured through coordination and

expansion of safety net services and cooperative mental health case management. The Mid-America Assistance Coalition, which we are honoring today, is a critical element in this regional safety net system. The region's entire health system will be advanced by creation of a community-driven health information exchange to support the interaction of electronic medical record systems, which will enable physicians, hospitals, and clinics to coordinate care and to improve the efficiency of medical information management.

- Workforce intelligence system to connect workforce development programs to expanding areas of the economy

The partners of One KC WIRED, a four-year workforce development initiative now coming to the end of its funding cycle, are creating a new system of workforce intelligence to better understand and cooperatively address the workforce needs of key and expanding sectors of the economy — including green and energy-related businesses

Our regional goal to create **Quality Places** includes several strategies, beginning with a land-use vision of vibrant places throughout the region.

Over the last year, regional citizens and local governments have articulated a common vision of more sustainable land use patterns — a vision of robust growth in both existing and expanding areas that is increasingly focused in activity centers and along strategic transportation corridors throughout the region—the goal is to encourage sustainable land-use patterns and to respond to emerging market demands driven by demographics, fiscal realities and the cost of natural resources. Over the coming years, the vision will continue to be discussed and refined, and in fact, will be the central theme of *Imagine KC*, a program that MARC will cooperatively produce with KCPT to educate and engage viewers on the choices and strategies to create a vibrant, connected and green region.

- Programs to support healthy first suburbs and sustainable expanding suburbs

The First Suburbs Coalition is cooperatively developing resources to enhance the stability and character of the region's first suburbs, including a home improvement loan program, planning initiatives to guide reinvestment, promoting green investment in older homes and addressing the threat of mortgage foreclosure. Ensuring the sustainability of both older and newer suburbs will be one of the themes of a competitive Sustainable Communities planning grant now under development.

- Innovative strategies for sustainable urban reinvestment

The Green Impact Zone has attracted national attention for implementing an innovative strategy for transforming an urban neighborhood using sustainability as a central organizing theme. The initiative integrates both people-based investments and place-based investments and it links the community to resources and support throughout the region. Congressman Cleaver, whom we are honoring today, is the spark plug for this effort, and with his leadership and the hard work of dozens of organizations and hundreds of citizens, the effort has, to date, attracted over \$120 million into our region to support this neighborhood and related city-wide and region-wide programs. Success in this community will help us expand the effectiveness of urban reinvestment throughout the region.

*A thriving region requires **Efficient Transportation.***

- Long-range transportation plan to promote system performance and sustainability

Next week the MARC Board of Directors is expected to adopt Transportation 2040, the region's new long-range transportation plan. It is a comprehensive plan that advances specific goals to enhance the performance of our transportation network, as well as our regional vision of sustainability by more directly addressing public health, place making, economic vitality, climate change and energy use. It is supported by performance measures and sets the framework for targeted regional objectives, such as goods movement, land conservation, safe routes to schools, and enabling walking and biking.

- Innovations and investments to ensure an efficient, safe and well maintained road network

The long-range plan will also guide and support regional investment decisions to ensure we effectively maintain and manage our highway and road network, including programs such as the Regional Rideshare program, the Destination Safe Coalition and expanded use of technology to manage traffic efficiency through programs such as Operation Green Light that coordinates over 600 intersections in 26 cities and supports the KC Scout freeway management system operated cooperatively by the two state transportation departments.

- A robust public transit system that connects our region and creates opportunities for sustainable development

We remain focused on our strategy for more robust public transit as a means for achieving broader community development and sustainability goals. Formal efforts are underway to analyze and give shape to eventual investments in fixed guideway services, such as commuter rail and street cars.

And earlier this year Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood came to Kansas City to announce our region's success in securing a highly competitive federal grant — the so-called TIGER program — which is bringing \$50 million dollars into our

region to rebuild basic transportation infrastructure in the Green Impact Zone, including extending the reach of KCATA's new green bus rapid transit system along Troost Avenue and enabling major investments in eventual BRT lines along State Avenue in Kansas City, Kansas, and along the Shawnee Mission/Metcalf corridors in Mission and Overland Park—all of which will create new mobility options for both urban and suburban residents. Steve Klika, whom we are honoring today, has been one of a number of steadfast leaders in advancing this important objective to create a more expansive regional transit network.

A Thriving Region means a **Healthy Environment**, including a system of green infrastructure to protect natural resources, promote recreation and preserve scenic character

The region's MetroGreen<sup>®</sup> trail system now exceeds 300 miles, and a regional effort is underway to preserve the former Rock Island corridor to bring the KATY Trail further into the region. Another effort is focused on creating a major connector trail spanning the state line as part of the Turkey Creek flood-control project. Cooperative strategies are also underway to address degradation of the Missouri River bed, to educate the public about water quality practices and to map and conserve our most important natural features.

- Regional solid waste plan to move toward a zero-waste society

The Solid Waste Management District has developed a strategic plan to move toward a zero waste society by building on its basic programs, such as Household Hazardous Waste disposal and grants to broaden recycling, including Ripple Glass, the new purple bins throughout the region that recycle glass into fiberglass insulation. It is now supporting major new regional material recovery facilities and promoting public policies and household, construction and industrial practices that have the potential to dramatically reduce solid waste.

- New generation of strategies to meet clean air standards

The Air Quality Forum is bringing together regional stakeholders to develop an updated Clean Air Action Plan to help our region improve the quality of the air we breathe in ways that also advance other community goals — such as conserving energy, promoting clean fuels and expanding public transit —all to minimize the need for new regulatory interventions.

- Cooperative initiatives to promote energy efficiency

Local communities are developing cooperative strategies as part of recent federal investments in municipal energy efficiency, and Kansas City, Missouri, the Metropolitan Energy Center, KCP&L and MARC partnered to secure \$20 million to support strategies to expand the market for energy retrofits in commercial and residential buildings throughout the region, and 26 smaller cities across the region will benefit from a \$4 million grant to introduce a new generation of energy efficient street lights.

A Thriving region has **Safe Communities**, including robust emergency management systems to reduce risk and to respond to and recover from disasters

Last month, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and Missouri Governor Jay Nixon came to the MARC offices to recognize the region's emergency preparedness and homeland security network for its cooperative and strategic approaches to emergency planning, training, community outreach and equipping the region's response network. The region's emergency response leaders have recently reorganized to more systematically assess response capabilities to track and measure the success of regional emergency programs.

Our success in this area is the direct result of dedicated professionals like Fire Chief Kent Cantrell, one of the regional leaders we are honoring today.

- State of the art regional emergency communications and information management systems

Earlier this year, the region activated a groundbreaking system that enables all public safety agencies to communicate during large-scale emergencies and provides the technological backbone for even more sophisticated regional radio systems to be deployed over time. The region also implemented related information-sharing technologies, including connecting public health alert databases. And the region continues to cooperatively invest in and expand coverage of 9-1-1 services, most recently broadening wireless access on the region's trail network, ensuring back-up coverage and expanding call-taker training.

A thriving region has **Effective Government**, including cooperative strategies to advance federal and state policies and support

The region uses MARC to speak with a unified voice to advance important goals in Washington, DC, Topeka and Jefferson City, and this past year we have been especially focused on sharing information and ideas to make sure we fully access and effectively use federal recovery funds. The region was one of the first areas in the country to successfully allocate its transportation recovery funds.

- Cooperative services to support the efficiency of local governments

Local governments cooperatively address technical and professional training and leadership development through the Government Training Institute, including an innovative Academy for Sustainable Communities. The Regional Purchasing Cooperative helps to achieve costs savings and the Government Innovations

Forum helps to forge new ideas for cooperation and resources. MARC also helps to support important strategies led by local governments and many other region-serving agencies.

- Research, data and geographic information systems to support fact-based decision-making and service delivery

Quality information systems are key to cooperation, including data, forecasting and analysis of economic and demographic trends; producing increasingly sophisticated aerial maps; and maintaining electronic geographic files that are the backbone for regional services, decision making and public information.

- Programs to ensure effective public outreach and engagement

In all these regional efforts, we are committed to engaging citizens in shaping visions, making decisions and supporting the implementation of key strategies. Cooperative citizen engagement programs, such as One KC Voice, have laid the groundwork for new strategies, including the Center for Civic Excellence, a new partnership launched this month to foster the successes of the National Civic League's All-America City Award, which has chosen Kansas City as its permanent home, in large part because the communities which comprise our region exemplify the best of civic engagement.

This is your work at MARC. It is impressive work, and you should be proud of what you are accomplishing.

You know, we talk a lot in this town, especially when it comes to regional affairs, about our deficits and our differences — on what we don't have and why we can't agree on how to get it.

A thriving region is not preoccupied with problems; instead, it builds on what it has — its assets and strengths — and works with a sense of purpose and energy

to make itself stronger. All regions house a diversity of needs and perspectives, but a thriving region concentrates on how to weave them together into mutually supportive goals and strategies. And, a thriving region is measured not by what it has, but by its potential to achieve its vision — as a result, it is as concerned about how it works together as it is about what it does.

If the work you are doing at MARC—work that is strategic, positive, energetic and inclusive-- is any indication, we are indeed, well on our way to becoming a thriving region.

Thank you for all you do.