Applying Theories of Collaborative Governance:

Comparative Perspectives on Seattle’s Light Rail Project*

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By now it is a commonplace that the formulation and implementation of public policies and programs occurs across organizational and sectoral boundaries through a variety of coalitions, partnerships, contracts, networks, and other affiliations. Compared to the textbook image of policy design and delivery through a series of hierarchical relationships (voters-legislature-executive branch), such collaborative governance – or multi-party, participatory problem solving – presents both opportunities and risks. It offers to enhance inter-organizational capacity and civic engagement, increase the resources and expertise available to public officials, and improve program performance (e.g., Cooper et al. 2006; Huxham and Vangen 2005). At the same time, it raises the transaction costs of agreeing on policy designs and increases coordination costs and veto points in implementation, among other difficulties (e.g., Moe 1989; Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; Weber 1998).

These general findings notwithstanding, studies of collaborative governance have not cohered around a common theoretic framework, and many lack grounding in an established theoretical tradition. Some focus on network structures and ties (e.g., Milward and Provan 1995); others on network management and coordination processes (e.g., McGuire 2002; Goldsmith and Eggers 2004; Herranz 2007); still others on institutional factors such as coalition membership, resources, and decision making (e.g., Stone et al. 2001; Callahan 2007). Several recent analyses construct their own frameworks using a mélange of constructs (e.g., Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006; Ansell and Gash 2007). This eclectic intellectual arsenal encompasses a range of concepts and entry points for research, but risks incommensurability across studies and offers only diffuse, sometimes inconsistent insights to practitioners.

Given the many practical challenges and analytic foci that collaborative governance presents, the limited attention to social scientific theory and the proliferation of frameworks is no surprise. To encourage analytic consistency, nevertheless, the field would benefit from more explicit theoretical orientation and clarification of the applications that particular theories have to different empirical dilemmas.

This article addresses this state of intellectual affairs by presenting a typology that distinguishes domains of collaborative governance and identifies the analytic foci that different theoretic traditions in social science emphasize in each domain. A case study of a rail transit infrastructure project compares the insights that different theoretic lenses have to offer, and illustrates their analytic complementarity. The conclusion develops hypotheses about the comparative utility of different theoretic traditions for studying particular dilemmas of collaborative governance.

I. Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Collaborative Governance

Collaborative governance involves dilemmas of collective action in two domains – policy authorization and implementation. The contours and specifics of those dilemmas are in dispute, however: The theoretical perspectives of rational choice and sociological institutionalism hold
contrasting assumptions about the predispositions and analytically salient dimensions of the actors involved in collaborative governance (Hill and Lynn 2003). As Figure 1 shows, distinguishing rational choice and sociological studies of policy authorization and implementation yields four categories of scholarship.

A. Rational Choice Theories

Rational choice theory is rooted in an economic understanding of political behavior. As such, it assumes that political actors respond primarily to incentives in order to maximize their self interests. Accordingly, rational choice studies of collaborative governance examine actors’ interests, information, and incentives within the institutional structures and power relationships that affect policy authorization and implementation.

Policy Authorization: Public choice theory examines actors’ interests and the institutions that mediate and aggregate them, paying particular attention to collective decision-making arrangements and coalition structures (e.g., Callahan 2007; Ostrom 1990). Public choice theory is well suited to explaining how coalitions take shape, evolve, and interact during policy debates. Its fundamental assumptions are that actors’ interests diverge and that dominant actors design policies and governing institutions to favor their own interests. If a coalition can consolidate power, therefore, dramatic changes in policy direction are possible. Because interests diverge, however, coalitions have difficulty forming and sustaining themselves. In consequence, debates about institutional structures and policy designs are frequently contested and difficult to resolve. Dominant actors have difficulty imposing their preferences directly, leading to compromised policy designs and implementation structures (McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast 1987; Moe 1989).

Policy Implementation: Principal-agent theory focuses analytic attention on the interests, incentives, and information of policy authorizers and implementers (e.g., Pratt and Zeckhauser 1985; Milward and Provan 1998). Core assumptions include largely hierarchical relationships, divergent interests, and asymmetric information between authorizers and implementers. These conditions appear between legislatures and administrative agencies, between managers and line staff within government agencies and between administrative agencies and outside contractors or regulated entities. Because the interests of authorizers and implementers diverge, authorizers must create incentives and monitor implementers to encourage pursuit of their directives, but problems of information asymmetry make monitoring problematic. When implementers are accountable to multiple principals, moreover, different policy directives can create further conflict between authorizers’ and implementers’ interests, incentives, and information sources (Waterman and Meier 1998; Bertelli and Lynn 2004). As a result, implementers have discretion to pursue their own interests within constraints set by authorizers’ policy directives, incentive schemes, and monitoring.

B. Sociological Institutionalism

Sociological institutionalism assumes that individuals and organizations are embedded in relationships with others, and act in order to understand and manage those relationships. Its
primary analytic foci are the formal and informal institutions that shape actors’ understandings and behavior. Sociological studies of collaborative governance therefore focus on the networks of actors involved in policy authorization or implementation.

**Policy Authorization:** *Policy network studies* examine the beliefs, relationships, and exchanges of actors who seek to influence policy designs. A policy network consists of governmental and non-governmental organizations that have an interest in a particular policy domain (Laumann, Knoke, and Kim 1985; Rethemeyer and Hatmaker 2008; Rhodes 2007). Because their interests are interdependent though not all complementary, the actors in a policy network ally and compete with one another to influence policy decisions affecting issues of mutual concern. Standing relationships among network actors enable them to exchange information and resources related to policy proposals in timely, efficient ways (Heelo 1978). Over time, moreover, common core beliefs and exchange relationships among sub-groups of network participants give rise to coalitions that advocate attention and solutions to particular policy dilemmas. Held together by shared norms and values, advocacy coalitions tend to be fairly stable and slow to change (Sabatier 1988). All these conditions make for efficient exchanges of information within and across relatively stable coalitions, leading to policy decisions that tend toward incremental and gradual change; radical departures from prior policy trends are relatively rare.

**Policy Implementation:** Research on *collaborative public management* analyzes the relationships and interactions of organizations that work together to deliver public programs, projects, or services. Motivated by policy mandates, joint problem-solving opportunities, perceived gains in power or legitimacy, or resource dependence, organizations in similar or related fields may collaborate with each other or with citizens to implement policies (Oliver 1990; Sandfort and Milward 2007; Feldman and Khademian 2000). Where principal-agent theory views implementation relationships as arms-length and vertical, collaborative public management focuses on horizontal partnerships and relational contracts among implementers and the inclusion of non-governmental stakeholders in implementation decisions and activities. Because collaborators must coordinate their implementation efforts, collaboratives benefit from strategic leadership and management to develop and sustain operational capacity. By definition, however, collaborative leaders lack direct control over their partners, who are often suspicious of explicit assertions of authority (Bardach 1998). Collaborative public managers therefore tend to rely on passive or facilitative tactics, such as mobilizing, activating, and synthesizing relationships among partners (McGuire 2002; Herranz 2007). Such tactics may enable joint information sharing, learning, and capacity building as well as policy implementation (Agranoff 2007). Over time, these sorts of interactions can strengthen working relationships, mutual knowledge, and shared values among partners (Jones, Hesterly, and Borgatti 1997).

### C. Insights and Limitations of Disciplinary Theory

The four categories of scholarship in Figure 1 delineate theoretic traditions, conceptual frameworks, and analytic variables that researchers use to study collaborative governance. The categories are too schematic and discrete, though, to capture adequately the diverse combinations of governance activities in which policy actors engage. The rigidity of the categories in Figure 1 belies policy actors’ inherent mix of rationality and sociability as well as the inevitably blurry boundary between policy design and delivery. The social relationships among the partners in an implementing collaborative, for example, enable them to band together as an advocacy coalition to
advance their rational interests in debates over policy design (Smith and Lipsky 1993). Inversely, the members of an advocacy coalition may maintain their working relationships and joint influence beyond the enactment of a particular policy in order to ensure that their interests are addressed during its implementation (Brodkin 1990).

The schematic distinctions among the categories in Figure 1 nevertheless reveal two useful insights about the study of collaborative governance:

• Both policy authorization and implementation feature challenges of collective action, so grouping them together under an umbrella concept such as “collaborative governance” makes analytic sense. Authorization and implementation nevertheless entail distinct challenges of collective action, as the contrast between public choice and principal-agent theory makes clear. Authorization requires collective choice – periodically mediating and aggregating a majority of actors’ interests to agree on policy designs. Implementation features an agency problem – continuously coordinating the actions of all (or most) relevant actors to deliver programs, projects, or services. While policy authorization requires a smaller proportion of all relevant actors to act together than does implementation, the joint action it requires demands agreement on policy provisions, whereas implementation demands coordinated behavior. These distinctions suggest that policy authorization and implementation feature different threshold requirements for collective action.

• Despite their similar attention to the political and organizational challenges of policy authorization and implementation, scholars working from rational choice and sociological institutionalist perspectives have different assumptions and analytic foci. Rational choice theory assumes actors' interests and bases of information diverge; hence authorizing coalitions as well as implementing relationships between principals and agents are prone to instability and opportunism. Rational choice analyses also focus primarily on incentives and information as the primary tools available to policy entrepreneurs and implementation principals seeking to align the interests of, respectively, coalition partners and implementing agents. Sociological views of collaborative governance, by contrast, assume that policy actors are inherently sociable and embedded in relationships grounded in common interests or core beliefs. Accordingly, sociological theories assume that advocacy coalitions and implementing collaboratives are fairly stable and bound by social conventions. Analyses therefore focus on shared meanings and exchanges of ideas and resources as tools for coordinating collective action during both policy authorization and implementation (e.g., Immergut 19XX; Hall and Taylor 19XX).

However familiar these observations may be in theoretical terms, they are important for the practice and study of collaborative governance because they highlight challenges and opportunities for aligning the interests and actions of the actors involved in policy authorization and implementation. Such alignment, in turn, matters a great deal for the processes and outcomes of inter-organizational policy making (Sandfort and Milward 2007). As the observations above demonstrate, though, the challenges of achieving such alignment vary depending on whether policy design or delivery is at stake, as well as on scholars’ assumptions about the ties and tools that enable (or inhibit) collective action. In short, the collective action dilemmas involved in collaborative governance vary in intensity, focus, and implications depending on the stage of the policy process and the theoretic assumptions one favors.
This recognition, in turn, suggests one of two possible courses of epistemological action. One is to retreat from using overly broad constructs such as “collaborative governance,” in favor of more specific constructs such as those employed by each of the theories reflected in Figure 1. This approach enhances analytic precision, but risks abstraction from the real world of multi-party, participatory authorization and implementation of public policy, due to the schematic and rigid nature of the theories. On the other hand, we might combine the various theories in the field to pursue comprehensive studies of policy authorization and implementation by multiple actors who simultaneously engage in partially cooperative and competitive strategies. While this second alternative risks analyses that are complex and vague, it may capture better the mix of rationality and sociability that shape real actors’ efforts in the policy-making process. The four theories in Figure 1 identify analytic foci to develop and illustrate its potential.

Public choice theory suggests a focus on:
- the interests and incentives of stakeholders
- the contestation of policy designs and governance institutions

Policy network studies suggest focusing on:
- relationships and exchanges among policy network members
- the core and secondary beliefs of advocacy coalitions

Principal-agent theory suggests comparing:
- the interests, incentives, and information of authorizers
- the interests, incentives, and information of implementers

Scholarship on collaborative public management suggests examining:
- relationships and exchanges among implementing partners
- collaborative management tactics.

To assess the compatibility of the four theoretic approaches to studying collaborative governance, this article uses these foci to construct distinct analyses of a case study of a recent rail transit infrastructure project. Taken separately, the analyses illustrate how each of the four theories by itself fails to apprehend the full array of variables and considerations at work in the case. Taken together, the analyses illustrate the benefits of combining the four theories to analyze collaborative governance from a comprehensive perspective that encompasses rational and social considerations in both policy authorization and implementation.

II. Research Design and Methods

The case under consideration is the design and construction of the Sound Transit light rail line in Seattle, Washington. Designing and building transportation infrastructure projects in the contentious environments that currently predominate in large urban areas present challenges that epitomize both the opportunities and the risks of collaborative governance. Projects such as the “Big Dig” in Boston or the Los Angeles Metro are beyond the scope of any single public or private organization to design, finance, and construct, and they affect a wide variety of stakeholders (neighborhoods, businesses, environmental groups, etc.). Inter-organizational partnerships, public-private contracting relationships, and inclusive public involvement processes are almost inevitable. Furthermore, the complexity, long time lines, and myriad actors involved in developing and delivering the projects frequently combine to produce cost over-runs, delays in design and construction, and other implementation problems. Political difficulties, finally, are
inherent in large urban infrastructure projects, since their construction creates numerous, concentrated disruptions to neighborhoods, businesses, and the environment in the short run, and offers only diffuse benefits in the long run. Project design and delivery therefore entail numerous, entwined challenges related to securing and maintaining political authorization as well as to coordinating and monitoring the tasks associated with implementation.

Of the different types of urban infrastructure projects, rail transit is especially prone to these challenges. Rail transit has been advocated on a number of grounds, including highway congestion mitigation, air pollution mitigation, fighting sprawl, economic development, and assisting disadvantaged sections of the population (Katz, Puentes, Bernstein, 2005). These divergent definitions of the “transit problem” give stake holders different expectations of transit projects, making pro-transit coalitions broad but not especially deep or robust. For every advocate and analyst claiming project benefits, a counterpart claim has materialized in opposition. In the politics of policy analysis, it has proven statistically difficult to put controversies over the competing claims to rest (Rubin, Moore, Lee, 1999). Most aggregate benefit-cost analyses ultimately conclude that rail transit should not be built in the first place (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003; Downs 2004). For these reasons, project advocates struggle to construct convincing technical arguments, and opponents tend to be both vociferous and persistent. Advocates and administrators of rail transit thus face an array of collective action challenges related to project design and delivery.

As the Sound Transit light rail case makes clear, the complexity and interdependence of these challenges reflect core dilemmas of collaborative governance. The analyses that follow the case below investigate how actors with stakes in the Sound Transit light rail project pursued their rational interests and navigated the social relationships in which they were embedded to influence project design and delivery. A research assistant constructed the case using data from key informant interviews, media archives, and a review of documents related to the light rail project. To develop the analyses, I sorted the data in the case according to the assumptions, predictions, and analytic foci of the four theories of collaborative governance discussed above.

III. The Saga of Rail Transit in Seattle, 1968-2009

Efforts to build high capacity rail transit in the Seattle-King County area began in the late 1960s, and have been contentious ever since. Ballot initiatives in 1968 and 1970 asked voters to approve a regional rail system funded primarily by federal dollars, but both failed at the polls. In 1988, though, with the metro area growing in size and scope, a strong positive vote on a non-binding advisory ballot measure reignited rail planning.

In 1990 the State Legislature voted to allow a sales tax levy up to 1% to contribute to transit projects approved by voters. By 1993 a joint regional policy committee of local elected officials and transit experts had crafted a $13 billion (in 1993 dollars) regional transportation plan including light rail, heavy rail and bus service components. Later that year, the County Councils of Pierce, Snohomish and King Counties voted to form a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) to administer the plan. The RTA Board was federated, consisting of local elected officials appointed by the three Counties’ Executives. Once formed, the RTA Board reduced the proposed plan to $6.7 billion to fund 68 miles of light rail from downtown Seattle to the surrounding suburbs.
Voters in the three counties defeated this proposal in 1995. Opposition was particularly strong in the suburbs outside the City of Seattle.

The RTA replaced its Executive Director and launched a full-scale campaign for a new ballot measure in 1996, aided by an outreach committee that recruited support from a coalition of major business groups, media outlets and political elites. Chastened by the 1995 vote, the RTA scaled back plans for light rail in the suburbs in favor of express buses and related infrastructure (e.g., park and ride lots, express lanes), and reduced the project’s time line to 10 years and the overall price to $3.9 billion. Funds would come from a mix of sources, including a .4% sales tax increase, a .3% increase in motor vehicle excise tax, local bonds, and a federal grants program. To appease suburban voters, the Board also created a “sub-area equity” policy, which dedicated the tax revenues raised in each sub-area of the three-county region exclusively to transit service in the same sub-area. The aim was to assure voters that their taxes would benefit only their local sub-areas, thereby broadening support for the plan among suburban voters.

These revisions enabled electoral success in November 1996, though two issues emerged in the process that shaped the project for years to come. The first was the persistence of strong opposition from some voters and elected officials in the suburbs to the east of Seattle. Symbolic of this opposition was the RTA Board's approval of the new plan by a vote of 15-2, with the two dissenting votes coming from the east side suburbs. The second was the need for the RTA’s staff and Board to expand their capabilities and knowledge substantially after the plan's approval by voters in November. At that time a staff of 23, most on loan from King County, were suddenly charged with building over 100 transportation improvements in 10 years. Newly hired Light Rail Director Paul Bay recalled that when he came to Seattle after working on light rail in several other cities, "Nobody at RTA knew anything about the requirements of federal funding, and we had to ramp up quickly to meet the project schedule." Bob White, the Executive Director at the time, likened the early days of the agency to "building a bicycle while you're riding it.

Within a year the RTA, renamed Sound Transit, had secured an initial grant from the federal government, and was positioned to receive larger, ongoing appropriations if it could win approval of a federal Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA). Once the agency staffed up, design proceeded quickly in order to meet the timeline associated with the FFGA application. The agency developed a Project Management Plan to hold staff and contractors accountable for completing specific tasks and to enable communication with the Board. In Paul Bay's words at the time:

We are attempting to establish a climate in the agency to insure we don't just say to the Board, "just trust us." We will bring you information. We will tell you the bad news as well as the good news. We want to identify any mistakes early, deal with them and respond to them. We want a very open policy.

Most Board members, however, took a hands-off approach to oversight in the early years, preferring instead to promote (or denigrate) the project in general terms for their own political gain. According to David Hopkins, King County's Regional Transit Manager, "The thinking was, until staff screws up, [the Board] didn't have to get terribly involved." This inclination of the Board’s was exacerbated by governance rules for key components of the project. As Sound Transit's Regional Policy Manager Paul Matsuoka described, “There were procedures and rules set up to make the agency [staff] oversee all contracting, to keep a bright, shining light between Board members and contracting decisions. That way, there would be no point where the Board would
exert any influence over who the contractors would be.” By both mindset and design, then, the Board’s information about project planning and implementation was limited.

As Sound Transit staff and contractors worked aggressively to meet the Project Management Plan’s schedule, however, the Board’s limited information contributed to delays and increased costs. Prompted by community concerns, ridership projections, and estimated construction costs, Board members debated and second-guessed staff recommendations about the light rail alignment in several Seattle neighborhoods. The alignments through the economically disadvantaged Rainier Valley and the University of Washington campus, in particular, raised concerns about design provisions and cost forecasts in the Project Management Plan. The differences in information and mindset between the Board and the staff left Sound Transit poorly equipped to fulfill its project management imperatives, as Board members neglected financial and technical issues in the face of vehement community concerns.

At the Board’s request, additional studies of the light rail alignments, station designs, and related provisions in both neighborhoods delayed the formal adoption of a final alignment by months. Rainier Valley residents and business owners extracted a concession from the Board in the form of a $50 million community fund to “mitigate impacts of the construction and operation of light rail in southeast Seattle” (Sound Transit Board, Resolution 99-34). The University of Washington Regents, meanwhile, led by former state Governor Dan Evans, negotiated numerous changes in the light rail plans that Sound Transit staff predicted would "cost the region half a billion dollars...and produce a transit system substantially inferior than what was originally proposed" (White 2006). Light Rail Director Paul Bay was astounded after his experience in Salt Lake City: “The University of Utah donated $1 million in cash, donated all of the right-of-way, and helped broker other deals because they understood the long-term benefit they would receive from the project.... The University of Washington just wanted us to go away.”

Sound Transit’s negotiations with the University illustrated the difficulties the Board and the staff had navigating the politics and the technical details of the project simultaneously. Board members "were good at [general political] leadership, but not as strong in dealing with [specific] external stakeholders. This goes back to their technical knowledge, or lack thereof" (White 2006). By contrast, "the University was always well prepared with in-depth technical arguments arranged by [their] negotiators and prepared by graduate students. They had these fantastic images of open cut station construction sites belching smoke, turning the sky black” (Jared Smith 2006).

The costly decisions involving the Rainier Valley and the University of Washington were not unusual. Many jurisdictions saw negotiations with Sound Transit as an opportunity to secure financial concessions (Agnes Govern 2006). The City of Seatac, for example, demanded $5 million to buy a new fire engine to serve the light rail line. According to Paul Bay:

Their argument was that the rail line was elevated in Seatac and they would need a new hook and ladder engine in order to provide access to those elevations. We had already developed and described methods of safety for removing and rescuing passengers from those elevated segments that didn’t require a hook and ladder engine. Despite that information, the Board continued to pressure me to just give it to them. They (Seatac) just wanted a new fire engine and they saw Sound Transit as the way to get it. I kept refusing the request and it was finally denied but that was representative of the other [mitigation] requests and how they were handled. [Similarly,] the Board adopted the $50 million Community Development Fund for the Rainier Valley without asking staff what that would do to the project budget.
In light of these decisions, Sound Transit's external Citizen’s Oversight Panel reported in 2000 that “building the system for $3.9 billion in 1995 dollars will not happen,” attributing many of the increased costs to "Board efforts to respond to community desires” (Sound Transit Board Meeting March 23, 2000). While the pressures from the University Regents carried significant weight thanks to the Regents’ political connections (Chair Dan Evans being among the most widely revered politicians in state history), the Board’s concessions to the Rainier Valley derived from more personal ties: Sound Transit Board member and King County Executive Ron Sims had represented Rainier Valley on the King County Council for years, and other Board members had longstanding ties to the neighborhood as well.

Further cost increases and changes in the scope of the light rail project resulted from geologic, economic, and regulatory factors. Soil samples from Portage Bay, adjacent to the University, required tunnels and stations deeper underground than originally planned along part of the route. The economic boom of the 1990s also drove up real estate prices in the region more rapidly than the project's original estimates. Sound Transit's financial management system and division of labor between staff and consultants, meanwhile, obscured the Board's knowledge of the rising costs of purchasing rights-of-way along the light rail route (Seattle Times 1999; Hopkins 2006).

As costs mounted, extending light rail all the way to its intended terminus in north Seattle became increasingly difficult within the financial plan voters had authorized in 1996. By mid-2000, the cost of building the line between the southern terminus (SeaTac Airport) and the University District consumed existing funds. The Downtown Seattle Association -- a consortium of business leaders and developers who had supported the project from its early days -- then publicly withdrew support for Sound Transit. If light rail did not run north of the University District, the Association argued, their goal of reducing downtown congestion would not be realized (Seattle Times 2000). Long-time light rail opponents, meanwhile, seized the moment to call for an outside audit of Sound Transit and to fan rumors that the light rail tunnel from downtown to the University District would cost considerably more than initial estimates.

These political difficulties spelled trouble for Sound Transit's financing: If the agency could not deliver the full north-south transit line within the 10-year timeline voters had approved in 1996, its application for a federal Full Funding Grant Agreement as well as its public compact with citizens were at risk. A ballot referendum passed by state voters in 1999 further threatened the motor-vehicle excise taxes (MVET) on which Sound Transit and other local governments relied to support transportation. Although the Courts later ruled that Sound Transit could continue to collect its portion of the MVET, the vote had sent a strong message: Federal funds were not the only ones at risk; local financial support for the project faced threats as well.

In this climate, the Sound Transit Board was shocked and dismayed to learn from their Executive Director in November 2000 that the final bid to design and construct the tunnel from downtown to the University District had come in $171 million over budget. External consultants later found that Sound Transit's right-of-way costs were underestimated by $56 million in the Tukwila area and by $144 million in Rainier Valley. With available funding already stretched to meet existing obligations, the Board felt both blindsided and boxed-in (Hopkins 2006). While Sound Transit was generating unexpectedly high revenue from the wealthy eastside suburbs, those funds were unavailable to cover the tunnel or the unanticipated right-of-way costs in Seattle due to the sub-area equity policy. A new public vote would be treacherous in light of recent mis-steps and criticism of Sound Transit, and the schedule for the federal Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) did not allow for one. Changing the tunnel plan to lower costs, meanwhile, could threaten.
ridership projections and associated fare revenues. In the next few months, Sound Transit's top management staff resigned, the *Seattle Times* withdrew its support for light rail, and a report by the U.S. Inspector General raised doubts about the final approval of Sound Transit's FFGA.

A review of project costs by Sound Transit staff determined “that the FFGA was critical, and without it the project would die,” according to one Board member’s staff advisor. The advisor continued ruefully, “The Board shouldn’t have had to dig to find that out” (Hopkins 2006).

Despite the dire situation, a core group on the Board continued to favor light rail. The new Board Chair, King County Executive Ron Sims, marshaled his substantial political capital in order to save the project. Sims’ support was unrelenting, even in the face of the growing wave of credible criticism, because “At some point Ron became a light rail believer...he made a determination that rail was important to the future of the region” (Hopkins 2006). Within a year, he convinced the Board to agree on a shorter rail line running south from downtown Seattle that connected to a shuttle bus to the airport, and worked with Washington’s Congressional delegation to secure a new FFGA for the shorter line. He then restructured the Board’s membership to remove a vocal critic from the east side suburbs.

Inside the agency, meanwhile, planning and management became more disciplined. Cost estimates for the new shorter line were extremely conservative, to decrease the likelihood of cost over-runs during construction. The new Executive Director, Joni Earl, appointed a light rail team that had experience using rigorous project management and controls. Improved planning and management by the staff helped restore confidence in the project among Board members, civic leaders, and the public. In turn, renewed external support from those stake holders helped shore up morale and performance among staff.

As is typical of large infrastructure projects, construction disrupted neighborhoods and encountered minor delays, but overall, ”There has been a recommitted zeal on the project; Sound Transit and the contractor deserve credit,” observed Jaime Garcia, the director of the Rainier Valley Community Development Fund (Lindblom, “Light Rail Construction is a Tangle of Trouble in the Rainier Valley,” *Seattle Times*, 4/4/07). The conservative cost estimates for the shorter line, combined with less expensive construction costs due to the economic recession of the early 2000s, created enough excess financing to extend light rail directly to the airport south of Seattle, and to the University of Washington north of downtown. Sound Transit staff designed these subsequent segments carefully to avoid the agency’s prior mis-steps with the alignment and depth of underground tunnels and stations. The staff’s experience working with consulting firms on the initial rail segments, finally, enabled them to structure bidding processes and negotiate contracts for subsequent links that served the project’s interest in timely and cost-effective design and construction. (Lindblom, “Sound Transit Tunnel Bids Are Cheaper Than Predicted,” *Seattle Times* 3/25/2009).

In 2007, with the rail line from downtown to the airport nearing completion and the metropolitan region continuing to grow, the Regional Transportation Investment District proposed a new package of highway improvements and transit expansion, including additional light rail. The political logic was that the highway improvements would appeal to suburban voters, while light rail would attract urban support. The ballot initiative failed, however, thanks to an unusual alliance of suburban rail opponents and urban highway opponents, led by former Sound Transit Board Chair Ron Sims. The next year, however, a transit-only initiative passed the regional ballot
with substantial support. In July of 2009 the first segment of light rail opened; crowds flocked to ride the trains on opening day, and ridership met or exceeded estimates in the ensuing months.

IV. Theoretical Analyses

As this account suggests, light rail proponents in Seattle faced ongoing collective action challenges related to project authorization and implementation that centered simultaneously on the politics of coalition maintenance, fiscal revenues and controls, and information management. Political and fiscal challenges included managing public expectations regarding construction costs and timing, responding to concerns regarding unfulfilled promises about planned costs and time lines, and securing additional funding to cover cost over-runs. The challenges of information management included creating rigorous standards and accounting procedures to make planning forecasts, monitoring and policing expenses, minimizing delays, and communicating about unforeseen challenges that arose in implementation.

When many of these challenges went unmet between the passage of the 1996 ballot initiative and the near-death of the project in 2000, criticisms from opponents mounted, and the project confronted a reckoning point. Eventually, a critical mass of local and federal authorizers withdrew their support because Sound Transit could not deliver the original scope of the project within the financing plan that voters had approved. New leadership on the Board and inside the agency nevertheless managed to reconstruct enough political, financial, and managerial capacity to design, build, and operate a shorter rail line, which in turn generated voter approval for subsequent expansion in 2008.

Four different analyses of these events follow. Each one examines the project using the analytic foci from one of the four theories of collaborative governance reviewed above. The discussion that follows shows how a combination of the analytic foci from all four theories offers a more comprehensive explanation of the project’s evolution than any one of the theories by itself.

A. Public Choice Analysis

Public choice theory focuses primarily on the interests and incentives of authorizers and on the contested nature of policy designs and administrative institutions. In the case of Sound Transit, all these factors caused problems that led to the light rail project’s political reckoning in 2000.

While bids to engineer and construct the light rail tunnel from downtown Seattle to the University District were the proximate causes of Sound Transit’s budget woes in 2000, prior actions of light rail advocates and stake holders gave rise to the budget itself as well as the cost over-runs. Their actions, in turn, stemmed directly from their incentives and interests.

After failed votes in 1968, 1970, and 1995, light rail advocates such as elected officials, business leaders, and transportation administrators and consultants had numerous incentives to make overly optimistic predictions about the project’s costs, prospective benefits, and completion timelines (Mackie and Preston 1998; Flyvbjerg, Holm, and Buhl 2002; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, and Rothengatter 2003). For elected officials, optimistic promises about light rail’s potential offered to: a) generate public support for their re-election, b) attract private interests involved in other development projects who could provide campaign contributions and other forms of electoral
support, and c) build the “legacy” they left behind upon leaving office. In addition, optimistic promises had little downside for most elected officials because of the complexity and long time line of the project: by the time any construction difficulties arose, at least some of the elected officials who initially promoted the project had moved on to other issues or new positions, and thus did not risk public retribution at the polls. As the strength of the pro-light rail campaign in 1996 suggests, moreover, property owners, businesses, and other private interests had incentives to promote rail transit because it offered: a) direct opportunities to profit from public investment in land; b) growth opportunities for nearby commercial development interests; c) possibilities for general commercial and economic growth by attracting new businesses to the region; and d) a ready fit with pro-growth ideology (Logan & Molotch 1987; Squires 1996; Blair and Kumar 1997). Transportation professionals were motivated to promote light rail, finally: a) in order to have business opportunities to practice their profession; and b) because their technical outlook often led them to start with “best-case” scenarios (Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, and Rothengatter 2003).

Political incentives also encouraged Sound Transit staff, board members, and consultants to add project features and concessions in order to mitigate environmental and neighborhood concerns that arose in the course of project design. Communities affected by the rail line such as the Rainier Valley, the University of Washington, and the City of Seatac, meanwhile, had their own incentives to seek rents by pressing Sound Transit for financial concessions or design changes to safeguard neighborhood amenities. Federal environmental impact regulations encouraged these pressures by requiring that infrastructure projects take elaborate steps to avoid harming disadvantaged communities and the environment (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003). For all these reasons, while mitigation provisions such as the Rainier Valley Community Development Fund shocked Sound Transit’s Citizen Oversight Panel and other observers, project stake holders and key authorizers had mutually reinforcing incentives to advocate and create them.

Beyond the oversight, timeline, and spending problems that these various incentives fostered, the public choice hypothesis about compromised policies and institutional designs explains many of the disagreements and distributional politics among voters and among Sound Transit Board members. Sound Transit served three counties in the greater Seattle region, and the short-run transportation interests of voters in the suburbs differed in key respects from those of voters in urban Seattle. These differences account for the ongoing challenges of securing voting majorities in favor of rail transit as well as the periodic compromises that rail advocates made with proponents of highway improvements and expanded bus service in proposed ballot initiatives. They also led to the federated structure of the Sound Transit Board, which featured elected officials who were appointed from each of the three counties. The federated Board spawned additional policy compromises driven by members’ interests and incentives: Because they were elected by voters to represent their own city or county governments, Board members had no formal obligations or incentives to serve the interests of Sound Transit through oversight or project advocacy. Rather, they had incentives (or at least opportunities) to use their Board roles to advance the interests of the voters in their home jurisdictions. Examples include the dissenting east side Board members’ votes to authorize light rail ballot proposals, the sub-area equity policy that precluded the use of suburban tax revenues to finance Sound Transit projects in Seattle, and the $50 million Community Development Fund that Ron Sims and other Seattle Board members created for the Rainier Valley.
Additional compromises in Sound Transit’s institutional sustainability were rooted in its use of multiple funding sources, each with its own competitive forum and advocacy demands. As the threats to Sound Transit’s MVET and federal FFGA illustrate, reliance on diverse funding streams created multiple authorizing networks and veto points for light rail, requiring Sound Transit to build robust links with Washington’s Congressional delegation as well as the capacity for savvy legal work in the state Courts.

As this analysis illustrates, the interests and incentives of light rail advocates and the compromised designs of policies and institutions help explain a number of the authorization and financial difficulties that have plagued rail transit in the Seattle region in recent years. As the policy network analysis that follows shows, however, public choice theory overlooks some important aspects of Sound Transit’s authorization.

B. Policy Network Analysis

Policy network analysis focuses attention on the core beliefs, secondary beliefs, and relationships within and across the advocacy coalitions surrounding an issue. These factors heavily influenced the composition of and changes in support for light rail both before and after Sound Transit’s political reckoning in 2000.

As discussed, the composition of the pro- and anti-rail-transit coalitions in Seattle stemmed from interests rooted in the varied demography of the metropolitan region, with suburban voters preferring to travel by auto and urban voters preferring transit service. The suburban opposition to rail-transit ballot initiatives and Sound Transit’s sub-area equity policies thus support a rational choice view of the coalitions surrounding rail transit in the case. At the same time, however, key factions of the pro- and anti-rail-transit coalitions coalesced around core policy beliefs driven as much by ideology or visions of the future of the metropolitan region as by demography.

The pro-rail-transit forces coalesced around civic leaders and elected officials in Seattle and densely-settled pockets of the northern and southern suburbs. They saw rail transit as crucial to the region’s future economic vitality and quality of life. This coalition was at its broadest leading up to the successful 1996 ballot initiative that created Sound Transit. Following the 1996 vote, the core of the coalition remained committed and active as a dominant majority on the Sound Transit Board and in various other implementation roles (e.g., Sound Transit consultants, Citizen Oversight Panel representatives, etc.). Beyond that core group, however, the broader base of political support for light rail in the region was contingent on the integrity and feasibility of Sound Transit’s implementation efforts. When implementation faltered during the design of the initial light rail alignment, the broader base of support wavered as key civic leaders and voters alike lost confidence in the agency’s capacity to execute the project.

The anti-rail-transit forces consisted of some suburban businesses and voters who lived in areas that would not be served directly by rail transit or who feared disruptions to their neighborhoods from construction, along with a mix of urban luddites and pragmatists who favored alternative transit technologies over light rail. While the suburban opposition to rail transit stemmed logically from demographic interests and incentives, the urban opponents were motivated more by core beliefs about the perils of rail transit. Comprised of radical environmentalists, advocates of bus rapid transit or an expanded Seattle monorail, and gadflies who favored shrinking the metropolitan base under the banner “lesser Seattle,” the urban opposition had limited political influence. They
nevertheless complemented the efforts of the suburban rail opponents by creating a considerable
nuisance for light rail advocates with public advocacy and consulting studies that emphasized (in
some cases, quite justly) the costs and inefficiencies of Sound Transit’s work (Rosengrant 2001).

The core beliefs of these two coalitions remained remarkably constant over the lifespan of the
light rail project, just as the Advocacy Coalition Framework predicts (Sabatier 1988). Support
from the downtown Seattle business community, major media outlets, and some elected officials
waned during the political reckoning that Sound Transit confronted in 2000 because their
secondary beliefs changed in response to poor project implementation. Because their core beliefs
did not change, though, these defectors returned to the fold once the Board and staff restored a
measure of financial and managerial integrity to the project. This link between implementation
capacity and political support suggests the need to analyze simultaneously the authorization and
implementation of collaborative governance initiatives.

After 2000, the revival of Sound Transit’s financing and management – and eventually its political
support – derived from political leadership by key Board members, especially then-Chair Ron
Sims. That leadership, in turn, stemmed from Sims’ core belief that rail transit was critical to the
future of the region. Sims’ efforts to save Sound Transit in the early 2000s are difficult to explain
using a rational choice view of his interests and incentives, since his run for Governor of
Washington in 2004 was doomed in part by his advocacy of Sound Transit, which had little appeal
beyond Seattle. A policy network perspective also suggests that Sims’ leadership was particularly
influential because of his political centrality within the local network of political elites (Heyman
1987). Put another way, the relationships that Sims and other die-hard light rail advocates had
with key local and federal authorizers and influencers enabled them to secure funding and acquire
staff capable of implementing the shorter, revised rail line between 2000 and 2009. Sound
Transit’s improved implementation work, one can argue, contributed to the electoral majority in
2008 that authorized additional taxes to support expanding light rail to the suburbs.

C. Principal-Agent Analysis

The rational choice assumptions of principal-agent theory suggest the analytic utility of comparing
the interests, incentives, and information of authorizers and implementers. The foregoing public
choice analysis of the incentives at work in Sound Transit’s authorizing network foreshadows the
financial management and oversight problems that the light rail project confronted. As costs
surpassed projections, completion deadlines slipped, and property owners and neighborhood
residents at risk of dislocation by impending construction raised concerns, however, asymmetries
of information arose among implementers and between authorizers and implementers. As
principal-agent theory argues, those asymmetries exacerbated the financial problems created by
the incentive structures in the authorizing environment.

The long time lines and uncertainties inherent in building light rail in urban areas make
information asymmetries quite common, as the expertise required to advocate, design, and
construct rail transit is complex and varied. In the Seattle case, expertise became particularly
silied as two distinct enclaves of professionals specialized in specific project tasks and skills.

One enclave consisted of the elected officials and civic leaders who advocated rail transit to voters
and managed the expectations of federal, state, and local funders. These political tasks proved
complicated, as urban Seattle – the largest natural constituency for rail transit – lost population
share and political clout to the suburbs in recent decades (Weir, Harold Wolman, and Todd Swanstrom, 2005, “The Calculus of Coalitions: Cities, Suburbs, and the Metropolitan Agenda,” Urban Affairs Review 40:6, 730-60). Complicating this demographic shift was the split in the urban base itself between rail-transit supporters and their opponents discussed above. Faced with growing suburbs partial to auto travel and a fragmented urban constituency, civic-minded leaders in Seattle struggled to enact and sustain the light rail project as community movements and identity politics fragmented their natural governing coalition. Preoccupied with the political leadership required to maintain a pro-light-rail majority under these conditions, Sound Transit Board members and other project advocates had little time or inclination to understand or undertake more technical tasks and skills.

The other enclave consisted of Sound Transit’s light rail planners and project managers, who by necessity adopted a technical mindset that equipped them poorly to communicate with Sound Transit’s political advocates. Effective rail-transit projects rely on capable planning, execution, monitoring and controls (Klastorin, Project Management: Tools and Trade-offs). Planning generates forecasts of the likely costs, benefits, risks, and other contingencies associated with different rail alignments, technologies, community and economic development trends, and patterns of human behavior. Execution requires coordinating timely and efficient joint production and delivery of numerous complex, interdependent project components. Monitoring and controlling entails tracking a project’s scope, schedule, costs, and quality to ensure that its execution comports with its plans (Project Management Institute, 2004, A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge, 3rd ed., Newton Square, PA: Author). Project management thus requires a range of technical skills, including prediction, production, measurement, analysis, and oversight, that draw on specialized applications derived from practical experience as well as applied statistics and economics (Meyer and Miller, Urban Transportation Planning, 1984).

Between the wide-ranging, specialized nature of the project’s tasks and skills and the limited exchanges of information between the two professional enclaves, Sound Transit lacked an integrated base of political and technical information about its light rail work between 1996 and 2000. This mismatch of information between principals and agents were understandable during the project’s early years. The number of rail transit projects with which any one city’s elected official and civic leaders are familiar is severely limited, due simply to the large scope of the projects and the limited geographic mobility of elected officials and civic leaders: Getting elected or being a civic leader requires deep familiarity with local politics and issues, which makes deep knowledge of multiple cities’ rail-transit projects hard to come by. Since Seattle had never implemented modern, regional light rail before, local actors had little familiarity with key project requirements. A few Sound Transit staff, such as Paul Bay, brought experience from other cities, but, beyond them, knowledge was thin compared to that of the outside consultants, who had experience working across cities, projects, and technologies. The knowledge of Sound Transit Board members, staff, and consultants, moreover, was inevitably limited regarding the uncertainties of geology, environmental issues, and community concerns that the light rail project encountered. Sound Transit’s forecasts anticipated some of these complexities in the aggregate and translated them into costs and ridership predictions, but provided little guidance about how to manage or address their actual manifestations during project implementation.

As the light rail project proceeded toward its political reckoning in 2000, these information gaps and silos remained within Sound Transit. Political leaders lacked the expertise to understand the
details of project management, and chose not to inquire about or develop an understanding of them over time. Project-management staff, for their part, assumed (either erroneously or strategically) that the detailed reports they generated to fulfill their Project Management Plan would interest and inform the Board (Bay 2006; Hopkins 2006; White 2006).

These sorts of information asymmetries are the core of principal-agent theory. To address them, it prescribes altering incentives and improving flows of information among implementers and between authorizers and implementers. The Rainier Valley Community Development Fund and other mitigation provisions, for example, offered incentives for key constituencies affected by light rail to cooperate with Sound Transit’s implementation efforts (though they also contributed to the project’s cost over-runs). The conservative forecasts and tighter project controls that Sound Transit put in place after 2000 helped balance incentives and information among implementers. An improved communications strategy also altered information flows by advertising progress on various project components to the public, and giving the Sound Transit Board specific accomplishments to promote.

**D. Collaborative Public Management Analysis**

The rational choice focus on incentives and information offers a straightforward explanation of Sound Transit’s implementation problems as well as some of the implementation changes that the new light rail staff instituted after the political reckoning of 2000. In an undertaking as complex, variegated, and uncertain as an urban light rail project, however, adjustments in incentives and information flows are helpful but not completely sufficient for successful implementation. As the different mindsets held by Sound Transit’s political and technical enclaves suggest, the array of actors involved in implementation – consultants, staff, Board members, and community stakeholders – were divided by more than their diverse interests and sources of information. They also had different frames of reference and understanding deriving from their distinct incentive structures and professional and community networks. Under these circumstances, project execution – timely, efficient, and coordinated production and delivery of numerous complex, interdependent project components by an array of actors – requires not only adjustments in incentives and information but also mutual understanding and collaboration (Sabel 1994). Two constructs from the collaborative public management literature therefore were also crucial to the turnaround in Sound Transit’s implementation of light rail after 2000.

First, the light rail staff developed more robust collaborative relationships with the communities most directly affected by light rail construction. When construction disrupted neighborhood businesses in the Rainier Valley, for example, most community concerns were allayed by a combination of financial assistance from the Community Development Fund and adjustments in construction practices arranged by Sound Transit staff. Financial assistance and adjustments in construction demonstrated a degree of good faith on the part of Sound Transit that helped some (though not all) community members understand and accept the disruptions (Lindblom 2007).

Second, Sound Transit strengthened its relational contracts and “governing by network” by strategically designing its network of consultants and contractors, improving communication with them, and enhancing their joint capacity for project delivery (McGuire 2002; Goldsmith and Eggers 2004). Once the shorter light rail was authorized in 2001, Sound Transit staff learned from their earlier experiences and improved their capacity to structure and negotiate project bids. As a
result, they let and managed contracts for later segments of the light rail line differently than they had managed the contract negotiations for the light rail tunnel between downtown and the university District in 2000 (Lindblom 2009). In particular, Sound Transit’s criteria and selection processes for the segments of the light rail line that were designed and bid after 2000 were more rigorous than their comparable work on the initial light rail alignment in the late 1990s. These changes resulted in the award of the lead contract to design the University segment of the new light rail line to a different contracting consortium than the one that designed and built the initial alignment from downtown to the airport.

By improving its capacity to collaborate with community stakeholders and external contractors, Sound Transit addressed some of the critical gaps in mutual understanding that plagued its implementation efforts between 1996 and 2000. While the improved information flows that principal-agent theory recommends were critical to Sound Transit’s implementation improvements in recent years, the agency’s increased capacity for collaborative public management has also contributed to those improvements.

V. Discussion and Hypotheses for Future Research

The foregoing case study reveals some instructive interactions between authorization and implementation for a collaborative governance initiative: Light rail won political support in the Seattle region by mobilizing an authorizing majority among voters in 1996, which in turn enabled it to win financial support from various local and federal sources. Those finances, in turn, supported the work of implementation by Sound Transit staff, consultants, and the community stakeholders involved in the negotiations over the alignment and construction of the light rail line. As Sound Transit encountered difficulties between 1996 and 2000, capacity and support dissipated in the reverse sequence: Implementation problems prompted concerns among members of the fiscal network, which in turn led supporters to defect from the authorizing network.

In Rethemeyer and Hatmaker’s framework of multiple networks (2008), this stylized story confirms that support for collaborative governance originates in the authorizing network, which mobilizes resources from the fiscal network to enable the work of the implementing network. It also reveals an inverse relationship among these networks that further research might investigate:

\[ H_1 \text{ Unresolved problems in an initiative’s implementing network may put pressure on its fiscal network, which in turn may influence the levels of support and opposition within its authorizing network.} \]

More generally, the dynamic interplay among implementation, financing, and politics suggest that researchers and practitioners should pay more attention to the links between authorization and implementation of collaborative governance initiatives: Authorization is an ongoing – not one-time – challenge, and is shaped heavily by implementation. In consequence, political support for authorization is at least partially contingent on implementation capacity and performance. Feedback loops between authorization and implementation therefore require leaders and institutions with “ambidextrous skills, processes, and structures” (Bryson, et al. 2009) capable of bringing political and technical expertise to bear simultaneously to address challenges of collaborative governance.
In theoretic terms, the foregoing analyses in combination show that the key turning points in the recent history of rail transit in Seattle can only be understood by analyzing both authorization and implementation from the perspectives of both rational choice and sociological institutionalism. Table 2 illustrates the ways that the analyses complement each other by comparing the explanatory value that the four traditions of scholarship on collaborative governance bring to the case.

At a general level, Table 2 shows that:

- Rational choice constructs largely explain Sound Transit’s challenges, with sociological variables playing only a small role. The difficulties of implementation that culminated in the financial and political reckoning of 2000 require a principal-agent view of the incentives and information asymmetries among authorizers and implementers. The financial and political reckoning itself stemmed largely from the incentives and information of key actors in the authorizing and implementing networks, as rational choice theories predict, augmented by the core beliefs of key members of the advocacy coalition opposing rail transit in the region.

- The subsequent revival of Sound Transit’s fortunes depended more on sociological constructs along with a smattering of rational choice theory. In particular, the core beliefs and network centrality of key members of the light rail advocacy coalition, better collaborative public management, and improved communication between principals and agents enabled the redesign and re-authorization of the light rail line.

These findings demonstrate that studies of the authorization and implementation of collaborative governance initiatives benefit from using analytic constructs drawn from multiple theories. They also suggest two hypotheses about how constructs from different theories apply to collaborative governance:

\[ H_2 \text{ Mismatched incentives and information cause problems for collaborative governance, as rational choice theories contend, yet dilemmas of collaborative governance may be too complex to “solve” with better incentives and information alone.} \]

\[ H_3 \text{ Addressing dilemmas of collaborative governance requires integrating political and technical work across authorizing, fiscal, and implementing networks enabled by a combination of rational and social capabilities and structures.} \]

VI. Conclusion

The case study of rail transit design and construction in Seattle analyzed here demonstrates how constructs from multiple theories can be combined to present a comprehensive analysis and explanation of a complex collaborative governance initiative. In particular, rational choice theories of public choice and principal-agent relations offered very effective analyses of the
challenges of authorization and implementation that Seattle’s light rail project faced, and provided a partial explanation of how those challenges were addressed. Constructs from theories of policy networks and collaborative public management, meanwhile, enabled analysis and understanding of the strategic persistence and maneuvering that overcame the project’s challenges.

The four theories thus offer considerable analytic and explanatory complementarity. Scholars might therefore consider studying collaborative governance by nesting theories and constructs. At least three approaches to nesting are possible:

1) Scholars could analyze both policy authorization and implementation, and the feedback loops between them, using constructs drawn a single theoretical tradition (rational choice or sociology).

2) Scholars could analyze either policy authorization or implementation using constructs drawn from both theoretical traditions.

3) Scholars could analyze both policy authorization and implementation, and the feedback loops between them, using constructs from both theoretical traditions – as in the combined theoretic analysis of rail transit projects offered above.

The discussion of the Seattle rail transit case suggested three hypotheses regarding the applications of different constructs to particular dilemmas of collaborative governance. In addition to these propositions, future research could usefully investigate whether affinities exist between the characteristics of certain policy fields and the analytic constructs central to specific theories. Collaborative governance in the transportation field, for example, may be especially well-suited to principal-agent analysis, due to the intensive reliance of project implementation on contracts.

To determine whether some theories are better suited than others to studying collaborative governance in particular policy fields requires recognizing the tight connections as well as the distinctions between authorization and implementation, and the ways in which constructs from different theories enable analysis and explanation of them. This paper has taken a conceptual step in this direction by sorting scholarship on collaborative governance into four categories of theory and exploring their complementarities and contradictions.
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