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REGIONAL AUTOMATION PLAN—REMARKS

It is most difficult to respond to the questions posed in the METRO Memorandum. The incredibly short time available for us to prepare thoughtful answers to such broad, far-reaching and momentous questions is shameful. That an "Interim" 1984 Plan is to be established in a month's time and \$100,000 be spent by the end of 1984 necessitates a haste that at best is regrettable, and at worst could prove to be irresponsible.

Were METRO an individual library or library system, such deadlines might be workable. But since it is a regional organization with representatives from every kind of library and both urban and suburban constituencies, an appropriate process to achieve a reasonable consensus seems to begin and end with today's meeting.

As a Trustee, I am most concerned that the Board's first meeting since the passage of the Omnibus Bill will have the approval rather than the discussion of an "interim" regional automation plan and the expenditure of \$100,00—a sum about equal to a fourth of the METRO budget. Prudence would seem to dictate that whatever additional time can be found for deliberation should be sought and utilized.

As to the question in the METRO memorandum, an attempt to respond is offered her, all of the above caveats withstanding.

1. Major goals and objectives. The holdings of as many libraries as is both feasible and reasonable should be converted to machine readable form. The bibliographic utilities through which such holdings are converted or located should be open, in principle, to all METRO libraries, and certainly to those libraries or agencies with special METRO interlibrary loan responsibility. It would be a grave mistake for METRO regional automation funds to be allocated in any way that would favor individual utilities over regional objectives. Certainly the diversity of bibliographic utilities in the METRO region ipso facto should be sufficient to ensure that machine readability of and access to holdings are what is crucial.

2. The Westchester Library System's Automation Plans and METRO. WLS currently has approximately 100,00 1978 and later holdings in the UTLAS network. WLS currently has 200,000 pre-1978 holdings in the MILCS database, but these records have not been maintained since October 1983. The WLS records in MILCS have been copied and transferred to UTLAS and will be available online and updated as an integral part of the WLS/UTLAS database within 90 days. WLS is willing to make available all of its holdings, either via online access to UTLAS or in the form of magnetic tape, to whatever libraries or utilities wish to have access to them.

It is WLS's plan to eventually have an online circulation and catalog system for its member libraries. Any specification for such a system will provide access to the system's database in the context of a regional automation plan. WLS believes in interlibrary sharing and will play a responsible role in whatever regional cooperative plans are developed.

3. METRO Planning Process. In principle, the planning process outlined does not seem unreasonable, but the time frame within which it is to transpire is unreasonable. That the stakeholders in the METRO region be included on an advisory committee is sensible. Included should be at least one representative from each of the bibliographic utilities used by members of the METRO region. Commitments which preclude or have not achieved consensus by the advisory committee and the METRO Board must be minimized, if indeed they are to be permitted at all.

As to the OUTLINE PROPOSAL... offered by Robert Sheridan, it certainly is deserving of consideration along with any and all other proposals and alternatives. That METRO's and LILRC's agency would be delegated to or preempted by one of METRO's members is of concern. This concern is not a reflection on the library suggested, but an assertion that METRO's regional automation responsibilities are far too broad to delegate to any single member.

Regarding the five studies suggested, studies 3. and 5. are reasonable. Alternate methods of data transmission and communications, study 3., are certainly in order; and data gathering pertaining to the libraries and resources in the region would seem to be a necessity for any future plan. But Studies 1., 2., and 4. Must be questioned, at least as framed.

Why MILCS is singled out for the sole focus of study 1. is questionable. That only two of METRO's four public library systems are currently using MILCS as their primary bibliographic utility, and none of the dozens of other METRO libraries use it at all makes such a presumed choice of MILCS at least needing of explanation.

Study 2. Is peculiarly couched, too. The underscored portion seems entirely reasonable, i.e. study "... all major library bibliographic databases in the metropolitan area ... and [their relation] to other data bases and national utilities." But then the several tasks to be accomplished only include an explicit reference to the not-so-ubiquitous MILCS, and no reference to any non-local databases excepting those maintained by vendors for the purpose of producing COM catalogs. Without raising any questions as to the reasons for such a sectarian view, it is sufficient to note that such a narrow focus is inappropriate for METRO.

The kind of transfer of files residing in the bi-region, called for in 4., raises at least a couple of crucial questions. The implicit assumption that the transfer of such files is a desirable "good" is not shared, here. The assumption's validity should be the study's first object, i.e. would it be better to transfer files between computers than to ensure access to the information within the computers? And "better" in this context means most cost-effective, or at the least, most feasible. Secondly, why the files to be transferred or shared are limited to the computers in the bi-region is most peculiar. Since the majority of library holdings in the bi-region reside in computers out side of it, such

a limitation is most perplexing. E.g. the OCLC, RLIN, and UTLAS computers collectively contain vastly more METRO area records than any bi-regional computer.

CONCLUSION

This cursory attempt to discuss the questions raised by the METRO memorandum and the Sheridan proposal simply underscore the problem of hastily developing short-term and long-term regional automation plans. The diversity and breadth of the METRO membership deserves better.