

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 9, 2018
To: CRCOG Policy Board
From: Lyle Wray, Executive Director, CRCOG
Subject: **Strategic Recommendations**

Based on current services and anticipated needs, CRCOG staff would propose a two pronged approach to CRCOG's strategic direction for the next three years:

- Metropolitan regional economic growth that is broadly shared
- Continuation and expansion of current shared and other service offerings

Metropolitan Regional Economic Growth

Connecticut is still struggling to recover from the recession of 2007 and faces many economic challenges at the state and local level. The metropolitan regional economy is almost flat as is population. National estimates of the impact of the federal tax bill are up to a 7.5% decline in Hartford County property values.

Given these headwinds, renewed attention to economic growth that brings along all residents in the region is emerging as a priority. While most economic levers for accelerating economic growth reside at the national and state level, experience from other metropolitan regions around the country suggests that the CRCOG metropolitan region can productively engage on accelerating economic growth.

Vision and Strategy. CRCOG's members can support and engage on the recently funded Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the metropolitan region. The CEDS has the potential to form a vital framework for the metropolitan region and many of its key players by outlining priority opportunities to pursue and a selected number of "game changers" to accelerate economic growth in the region. Some examples of game changers from other regions suggests that workforce and talent initiatives as well as transportation and transit and livability measures are within the grasp of the members of CRCOG. CRCOG member support and support of other stakeholders will be key in having a CEDS that actually outlines a viable strategy for the region.

Regional Futures Initiative (RFI). CRCOG members and staff have been on a "listening tour" of key public and private stakeholders to understand interest in a long-term regional futures group that will spearhead and sustain a regional futures initiative in

order to have sustained and long-term economic planning and support for the region. An RFI Steering Committee would pick up, refine and implement the CEDS as developed. Continuation and furthering RFI could itself be a “game-changer” for the region’s economy as many of efforts will require sustained attention over years to produce results.

Some candidate items that the CEDS and RFI could consider as “game changers” could include:

Talent Development. Talent availability is a critically important competitive factor. Assuring skills availability is complex. One underlying issue is ‘misalignment’ between employers and the talent pipeline system (K-12, higher-education, job training programs, and adult education. In addition, competitor states are building a very strong manufacturing German style apprenticeship system (e.g. Colorado with 20,000 slots for \$9.5 million, Washington State is making a similar effort). Initiatives in this area are not financially out of reach for a regional effort.

Support for CTfastrak and CTfastrak expansion. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) systems and the vibrant station areas in them are one area that can help grow a region’s economy. BRT’s offer easier job access, and multiple transit oriented development opportunities. The CTfastrak has provided more than 7.5 million rides to date and ranked the region in the top ten of most improved jobs access metropolitan regions in the country. The next generation workforce places a priority on good public transit and vibrant places around the stations. CTfastrak is one example of attractive option that can be expanded to BDL airport and UConn Storrs to strengthen the region’s economic growth.

Intercity Rail Services. The Hartford Rail service launching in May 2018 is expected to raise ridership from 300,000 to more than 750,000 in a few years. Support for a Hartford to Boston Rail connection for a relatively low price to connect to Boston would significantly boost access to the region and increase economic activity on a variety of fronts.

Continuation and Expansion of Current Shared and Other Service Offerings

CRCOG has a significant portfolio of regional offerings that should be continued and expanded upon in order to offer members efficiency and savings opportunities.

Shared Services. CRCOG’s current shared services portfolio is the most developed in the state. Continuation of these services will be key to continuing the success CRCOG has enjoyed. Opportunities for expansion of these services should continue – either at a marginal level by adding additional bids, or at a significant level such as adding new IT Services or other new services as outlined in a separate memo on shared services opportunities.

Policy Center. The region and the state suffer for lack of a nonpartisan state, regional and local policy center to address important issues and to come up with a menu of “best practices” to advance important priorities. There have been various iterations of such an approach in the state but a broad policy center is not in place. The Advisory Commission in Intergovernmental Relations is working toward a modest foot hold in this direction in partnering with universities to address important issues such as public health organization in the state. The Hartford Foundation has hosted a number of meetings on the topic. There are a number of national models from Rhode Island to Kentucky to Minnesota (<https://civios.umn.edu/>) from which pointers may be drawn.

For the Policy Center, a full scale center could be done relatively cheaply. The groups that presented to the meetings convened by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving last year made this point. The model in Rhode Island costs about \$300,000 per year for staff and research stipends. New Hampshire’s Center has 2.5 FTE and a modest budget. UMass (Michael Goodman) indicated that you could endow a reasonable center for under \$5 million.

Other needs as they arise: CRCOG stepped up to the plate with Homeland Security response, Solid Waste Management and the creation of the Central Connecticut Solid Waste Authority (CCSWA) a number of years ago. More recently, CRCOG spearheaded the Ad-hoc Working Committee on Crumbling Foundations and continues to assist in the Crumbling Foundations issue. CRCOG staff anticipates that other unanticipated regional needs will arise and would recommend CRCOG be ready to take on new issues as the need arises to serve priority member needs.