



CRCOG 2018 Legislative Agenda January 17, 2018

The 38 cities and towns making up the Capitol Region Council of Governments understand Connecticut's state budget constraints. We believe CRCOG and the other COGs can help address these issues efficiently and effectively if provided with the right tools.

The tools CRCOG needs fall into two general categories:

- Removal of all barriers for inter-town service sharing and provision of a reliable,
- Steady revenue stream to the region that is independent of both state and municipal sources.

We have included more specific tools under "Metropolitan Regional Empowerment," below, and ask the legislature to act in this session to grant CRCOG and other Connecticut COGs the ability to help our state deal with the present crisis and future anticipated needs in our regions.

Metropolitan Regional Empowerment

- * **Expand Shared Services Offerings.** Support expanding shared services such as:
 - Technology and services based on the Nutmeg Cloud IT/software
 - Police, Fire, and EMS communications including conducting a regional PSAP study for operations and funding (including governance, equipment needs)
 - Reinstate the Regional Performance Incentive program
 - Use COG boundaries as framework for other district services such as workforce development and human services delivery
 - Receiving a fair share of national Homeland Security funds
- * **Stable Funding for Councils of Governments.** To be vibrant and effective, Councils of Government need long-term stability in funding. A direct, reliable source of funding, not dependent on either the State or municipalities, is needed.
- * **COGs as Counties for Purposes of Federal Funding.** Secure State approvals necessary for federal declaration Councils of Governments shall be considered counties for the purpose of receiving federal grants.
- * **Codify Council of Government Roles.** Codify roles in water and solid waste planning in state law.

We are also asking legislators to address the following priorities in the 2018 session:

Transportation

- * **Lockbox.** A transportation lockbox is an essential component for securing additional crucial transportation investments. The CROCOG region needs state or federal or new local sources of funding to maintain good repair and make improvements for roads, bridges, and transit to support economic growth.
- * **Tolling, Regulatory Authority, and Design-Build-Operate-Maintain Framework.** Revenues to the Special Transportation Fund are crucial to ensure a state of good repair, continue building a best-in-class transportation system, and encourage economic development. Tolling is a sustainable revenue option that all of our neighboring states use. Initiating the environmental process to establish tolling, working to define a regulatory structure, and ensuring a streamlined approach to delivery is in-place are focus areas that should be advanced.
- * **Capital Funding for Transportation Projects.** Support continued funding for the Town Aid Road Program, Local Bridge Program, and Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTICIP).
- * **Advance Critical Interstate Projects.** Support the Interstate 84 Viaduct Reconstruction and Charter Oak Bridge projects as they will provide significant congestion relief, improve safety, and encourage economic development.
- * **Passenger Rail.** Monitor and continue to push State activities to assure rail service from New Haven to the Hartford region comes on line as scheduled May 2018 and that the three planned rail stations in our metropolitan region are completed.
- * **Boston Rail Connection.** Advance efforts and work with the State of Massachusetts to close the rail gap between Springfield and Worcester to allow frequent passenger train service from Hartford to Boston.
- * **CTfastrak Support and Expansion** Continue the support of CTfastrak expansion to complete CTfastrak East and invest in CTfastrak service to Bradley Airport using existing HOV lanes.
- * **Facilitate Transportation Grants Process.** Develop expedited grant and approval process for State grants in aid for transportation-related development projects including LOTICIP and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), and support continuation of LOTICIP program as a successful alternative to STP-Urban Federal grants to Municipalities.

Economic and Environmental Vitality

- * **PILOT.** Create a statewide Pilot Impact Equity (PIE) program to address heavily impacted communities for tax revenue losses due to State properties and farm/forests, MM&E reimbursement, hospitals and colleges, and PA 490 lands to be funded by a modest increase in sales taxes. All towns would be expected to absorb a 15% loss of

nontaxable property without reimbursement for the public good. Also, restore state funding for Enterprise Zones.

- * **Regional Asset Districts.** Create Regional Asset Districts to promote regional recreational and cultural facilities funded through food and beverage taxes and local property taxes. Funds to be distributed by COGs for infrastructure improvements for these facilities.
- * **Brownfields.** Continue to support Brownfields testing and remediation funding to reuse impacted sites along transit and rail corridors and in other areas.
- * **Advance Sustainability.** Support sustainability approach through continuing energy conservation projects, micro-grids and ZREC projects for Towns/Boards of Education.
- * **Update Prevailing Wage Provisions.** CRCOG along with CCM and COST supports updating the threshold for renovation projects to \$500,000. CRCOG further supports having the project minimum threshold indexed automatically to inflation in the construction industry. CRCOG further supports combining the prevailing wage threshold for renovation projects and CHRO projects into a single threshold. While town views may vary on this issue, the consensus of CRCOG is to request an update to the threshold.

Education

- * **School Town Service Integration.** Require closer collaboration or integration of school and town administrative functions to reduce duplication costs.
- * **Special Education Funding.** Have the State assume all costs of special education with appropriate adjustments in ECS funding to reflect reduced special education expenditures at the local level.
- * **Individual Education Plan (IEP) Appeals Process.** Empower Regional Education Service Centers to serve as the sole appeal process for decisions on individual education plans to avoid unnecessary legal expenses and delays.

Technology

- * **Expand Nutmeg Network.** Support expansion of Nutmeg Network to additional towns, libraries and schools in the region.
- * **Advance Digital Equity.** Address digital equity issues by requiring Internet providers to provide low-cost service to households with the free or reduced lunch program.

- * **Accelerate the State use of strategic IT.** Require each state agency to develop a Strategic IT Plan and develop a common grant portal, one-door access for Human Services.

The following is the 2017 CRCOG legislative agenda and the results from the 2017 session. This is informational for Policy Board members and interested parties and will not be included in the final 2018 legislative agenda.

2017 CRCOG Legislative Agenda Update

Transportation

1. Transportation Lockbox. Rail, bus and infrastructure investments are critical to Connecticut's economic growth and competitiveness. To improve deteriorating infrastructure, structurally deficient bridges and protect new and planned investments in mass transit, CRCOG supports the creation of a transportation lockbox that ensures revenues targeted to transportation projects cannot be diverted for other purposes.

For additional revenues to be raised, a transportation lockbox is an important part of gaining support so that any of these revenues are actually spent on transportation and not diverted to other functions.

2. Hartford Rail Line Service to New Haven and New York City. Greatly expanded service is due to launch January 2018 with 17 trains daily to New Haven with some through to New York City. Construction is progressing well to meet this deadline. CRCOG strongly supports this project and an on time launch. CRCOG supports future completion of three new Hartford Rail stations in the region.

As of this writing, the launch has been moved to May 2018. This line is expected to grow from 300,000 to more than 750,000 riders within several years and will increase jobs access and other mobility from Hartford to New Haven and beyond.

3. Hartford Springfield Boston Rail Service. Connecting the metro Hartford region to major economic centers is a vital part of our economic future. With much better connection to New Haven and New York City about a year away, the missing link is connecting the 1.8 million residents of metro Hartford Springfield region with metro Boston's 4.7 million residents. In the last few years frequent commuter service has been extended from Boston to Worcester leaving a relatively small gap between Springfield and Worcester that needs double tracking. Track and related improvements with rolling stock would be in the \$700 million range for the Hartford Springfield Boston service. Since the project is largely in Massachusetts between Springfield and Worcester, we need to work with state and federal officials in CT and Massachusetts to advance this important rail service project. CRCOG strongly supports connecting our metropolitan region with metro Boston region with frequent passenger rail service.

Cooperated with Pioneer Valley Planning Commission for a paper with improved cost and benefit analysis in it. Next step is for MA state rail plan expected in early 2018 to include this project for early action.

4. CTfastrak Operation and Eastern Expansion. CTfastrak launched in March 2015, and average daily ridership has greatly exceeded projections. Expansion of service east of the Connecticut River will be realized in two phases, the first of which was completed in the fall of 2016. Phase I implemented enhanced local service by expanding service hours on five existing routes. Phase II will include enhanced service between Hartford and the University of Connecticut Storrs campus, CT **fastrak** service and amenities along the Silver Lane and Burnside Avenue corridors in East Hartford, and shuttle service in the Buckland Hills area. CRCOG urges continued investments in the infrastructure and operational subsidies for these expansion services, continued marketing of transit services, and timely delivery of the bus fleet and amenities to make Phase II a reality.

CTfastrak has provided more than 7.5 million rides at this writing and has been lauded at in the top 10 of transit providing jobs access increases in US metropolitan regions. The 2017 Legislature cut \$3 million over two years out of the CTfastrak subsidy. Expanded express bus service to U Conn Storrs launch fall 2017 with very positive early ridership numbers. CTfastrak expansion to BDL airport and upgrades over time to U Conn Storrs would be a strong positive for the region.

5. Transit Oriented Development for CTfastrak and Hartford Line Services. CT DOT has been carrying out planning efforts in support of development near rapid transit and rail stations and CRCOG has secured more than two grants to do so in the capital region. CRCOG supports the state assisting towns and cities in identifying tools and resources to leverage development around these stations and to work with anchor institutions to embrace and move on the opportunities being presented.

Transit Oriented Development construction is well underway in West Hartford and New Britain on the CTfastrak corridor and additional housing is under development in downtown Hartford within a half mile of the CTfastrak route. Additional support over the coming years to increase momentum would be a positive for the region.

6. I-84 Viaduct and I-84 and I-91 Interchange. CRCOG been active in the planning efforts to replace the Interstate 84 highway viaduct in a manner that addresses mobility and safety, reduces congestion, maintains access to regional employers and destinations, and looks to reknit Hartford neighborhoods with the downtown area. We support the advancement of fiscally responsible alternatives that reconstruct this segment of Interstate 84 while considering the importance of the Hartford Rail Line and a strong transportation hub in Union Station during the process. CRCOG further supports planning efforts to evaluate improvement alternatives for the Interstate 84 / Interstate 91 Interchange. CRCOG recognizes the need to explore alternative transportation revenues beyond federal funds to advance I-84 and I-91 projects. CRCOG further supports planning efforts to evaluate future improvement alternatives for the Interstate 84 and Interstate 91 Interchange.

Planning continues on the I-84 Viaduct and I-84 and I-91 interchange. Additional work may be frozen per governor's December 7, 2017 announcement and the next milestone is getting projects to a record of decision.

Other Issues

7. Support Expanding Shared Services. Over the past 10 years CRCOG has launched a number of new shared municipal services in addition to the longstanding cooperative purchasing and public safety services such as CAPTAIN. Nutmeg Network: With help from a number of partners and state funding, 35 out of 38 town and city governments are now connected to the Nutmeg network and are able to use the Nutmeg Municipal Cloud for a variety of services. So far internet telephone, hosting services, and a human resources portal are up with electronic document management to follow shortly. CRCOG requests the reinstatement of the Regional Performance Incentive Program grants (funded through car rental and hotel taxes) to support CRCOG expanding this critically important platform for our member towns and statewide. CRCOG also requests continued state support for building out the Nutmeg network and supporting innovative service sharing pilots.

Update: RPIP grants have not been reinstated and although the state continues to support the Nutmeg Network, the support is tenuous.

8. Allow Municipalities to Issue Urban Stabilization Bonds. State law change would allow municipalities to have discretion to increase the term of bonds from a maximum of 20 years to a maximum of 30 years for both new and refunding bonds. This would not require any state funds. These provisions, particularly the ability to issue refunding bonds in this manner, could provide significant debt service relief to Connecticut municipalities, particularly urban communities. There would be a “sunset provision” of four years from the date of enactment, so that municipalities would not have an unlimited timeframe to utilize this provision. CRCOG requests that the state legislature pass act to allow cities and towns the option to use urban stabilization bonds with a maximum term of 30 years up from the current 20 year limit.

Update: This item has been passed into law and should be considered complete and no longer part of the legislative agenda.

9. Provide Stable Funding for COG Regions. As the largest of Connecticut’s 9 councils of governments, CRCOG would benefit from stable funding in order to build capacity to serve towns and increase shared municipal services. State funding has fluctuated dramatically in recent years. CRCOG and the other 8 COGs can act as partners with the state and town and city members to work on important issues for the state in planning and operations. CRCOG requests stable funding to support regional efforts to enhance local government efficiencies and to serve our member towns and cities.

At this writing, CRCOG received notice from OPM regarding the payments for FY 2018 for Regional Services Grant (previously known as “State Grant in Aid”). The payment for the last quarter of 2017 was not made. CRCOG will submit a revised spending plan for the grant and would expect to receive the first and second quarter payment for the grant once the Notice of Grant Award has been executed.

10. Use COG Boundaries as Framework. In 2014 CRCOG assumed new boundaries as a regional planning organization with almost 1 million residents and 38 towns. In 2015,

transportation planning boundaries were completed for Metropolitan Planning Organizations including CRCOG. CRCOG is now carrying out the LOTCIP program of decentralizing and speeding up transportation projects.

CRCOG has recently received state approval to be a regional Economic Development District and will reapply for federal funds for regional economic development planning. This will allow a new Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy to be developed for the new region.

Update: CRCOG has received a federal CEDS planning grant and has selected a contractor for the process of developing of a regional economic development strategy in 2018.

CRCOG launched a regional human services council in 2015, as required by law, to consider issues that cross cut this very complex and resource intensive area such as opioid addition, homelessness and mental health services.

Update: The human services coordinating council continues to meet on a quarterly basis to address issues of regional concern.

CRCOG requests that when state government wishes to regionalize services, such as public health, that they first consider councils of governments as the possible framework and consult with councils of governments to come up with solutions to complex challenges such as public health boundaries, 911 dispatch and other areas.

Update: No further updates at this time in this area

11. Accelerate Use of Information Technologies to Transform Services by Implementing the State Strategic IT Plan. In 2016, a report endorsed by the MORE Commission recommended greater use of IT as a strategic resource for state and local government service improvement. Recommendations included support for the creation of a statewide technology plan, expansion the Nutmeg Network and Nutmeg Public Service Cloud and promotion of the Nutmeg Network through pilot projects that use the power of the network to enhance local government service delivery. The plan contemplated state agencies moving to electronic forms management, single application processes, common application and standardization of forms and common criteria for various qualification programs. IT capacity and services are very important for economic development and or the growth of the state's economy. CRCOG requests that the state adopt and implement the strategic IT plan to transform services in the state.

No progress to report on state IT issue at this time.

12. State Assumption of Special Education K-12 Funding. K-12 funding makes up a majority of most local budgets in the CRCOG region. Unfunded state special education mandates cause the towns and cities financial hardship that falls unevenly across the region. Communities that provide excellent special education services are apt to recruit families seeking those services and hence placing a burden on local taxpayers. CRCOG requests that the State assume costs of special education, holding towns harmless for providing quality programs for families in need, and families that move to towns for improved services. CRCOG

also requests a streamlined needs determination process operated at the regional (RESC) level accompany this assumption.

Update: Although the ECS formula changed considerably in this budget period, there was no movement regarding special education.

13. Update Prevailing Wage Provisions. CRCOG along with CCM and COST supports updating the threshold for prevailing wage projects to \$1 million. CRCOG further supports having the project minimum threshold indexed automatically to inflation in the construction industry. CRCOG further supports combining the prevailing wage threshold for renovation and new construction projects and CHRO projects into a single threshold. CRCOG additionally supports proceeding with the regulatory process by the CT Department of Labor to establish clear definitions for the criteria that identify prevailing wage projects. CRCOG supports updating the prevailing wage provisions in state law.

Update: Changes were made in the 2017 Legislative session and it is suggested that renovation targets be changed in the coming year.

14. Fair Share of Federal Homeland Security Funding for CRCOG Region. Federal resources for homeland security for the CRCOG metropolitan area has been dramatically reduced in recent years. As funding is reauthorized at the federal level, CRCOG requests that the risk areas in the region receive their fair share of funding compared to other metropolitan regions nationally with similar levels of targeted risk.

Update: reauthorization has not been put forward as of yet at the federal level. Propose monitoring this item.

15. Crumbling Foundations: CRCOG had a comprehensive Crumbling Foundations legislative agenda.

Remediation Fund: CRCOG supports the creation of a relief fund for homeowners experiencing crumbling foundations.

Update: A fund has been created through bond funding for \$20 million per year for the biennial budget up to five years of funding. A captive insurance company will also be created to administer this fund with COG membership.

Guaranteed Loan Fund for Concrete Remediation. CRCOG supports pursuing a potential state-guaranteed private loan fund or other private banking based loan fund to help homeowners facing crumbling foundations.

Update: The recently passed budget also included provisions for a loan fund for homeowners.

State Building Fee Waiver and Future Testing. CRCOG supports waiving the state portion of the building fee for any municipalities waiving fees for work on crumbling foundations. CRCOG supports testing of residential and commercial concrete for the presence of pyrrhotite and possibly establishing and regulating a maximum acceptable amount to be present in concrete loads.

Update: State building fee waiver has been achieved in the latest budget. A working group to review quarry standards will also be established.

Time Limits for Filing Claims. CRCOG supports reviewing increasing time limits for filing claims related to crumbling foundations with insurance companies as well as examining time limits for appeals and adjudication of such claims.

Update: a provision in the latest budget also included potential extended time for homeowners to file a claim after denial.

CRCOG proposes to continue to monitor the crumbling foundations situation, including the formation of the captive insurance company. There is no active legislative action proposed for the 2018 legislative session.