

CRCOG 2020 Legislative Agenda

Draft Prepared for the December 18, 2019 CRCOG Policy Board

December 16, 2019 Draft

The Capitol Region Council of Governments is made up of 38 cities and towns and serves one million residents covering most of the historic Hartford and Tolland counties. Our legislative agenda is divided into these major parts to work toward a **Vibrant, Green, Connected, Competitive Capitol Region**:

- **Invest in Transit Improvements for Economic Growth in the Metropolitan Region**
- **Support Implementation of the Metro Hartford Future Economic Development Strategy**
- **Support Testing and Remediation of Crumbling Foundations in the State**
- **Strengthen the Role of Councils of Governments**
- **Maintain Adequate Transportation Funding, and Improve Reporting, Grant and Approval Processes**
- **K-12 Education recommendations**
- **Local Government Revenue Diversification**
- **Increase Environmental Sustainability Initiatives**
- **Allow Regional Asset Districts for Metropolitan Regions**
- **Update Prevailing Wage Provisions**

Invest in Transit Improvements for Economic Growth in the Metropolitan Region

Investing in transportation and transit can produce increased economic growth for the region. The main requests are:

- **Re-Establish Hartford to Boston Rail Connection.** 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. CRCOG has committed to completing an economic impact assessment for this service.
- **Continue to Improve Hartford Line Rail Service.** Opened in 2018, the CTrail Hartford Line rail service has shown strong ridership on the Hartford-New Haven corridor. Strengthen the service by completing double tracking from Windsor to the Massachusetts border, complete Windsor Locks rail station and work with the region and communities to complete stations in Enfield, Hartford, West Hartford and Newington. Consider lower cost options station construction options and private public partnerships for the stations and station area.
- **Rapid Transit and TOD.** Accelerate transit-oriented development at the 17 rail and bus rapid transit stations in the region. Complete the CTfastrak expansion from Hartford to the Storrs campus of the University of Connecticut. Since opening in 2015, CTfastrak has

provided more than 11.4 million rides on the guideway and 18.7 million rides in the broader corridor.

- **Complete Six Transit Priority Corridors in the Region.** Upgrade transit with roadway improvements, signal improvements, shelters, stations, and passenger information electronic signage. In the Hartford Division, increase fixed route service hours by 18% and increase frequency of the Bradley Flyer Airport route. In the New Britain/Bristol Division, increase service hours by 16% for fixed-route service and increase service area for paratransit by 39%.
- **Broaden UPass Access.** Provide equal access to UPass program for private colleges with the same price structure and service areas as offered to students at public colleges.

Support Implementation of the Metro Hartford Future Economic Development Strategy.

The Metro Hartford Future regional economic development strategy is dedicated to accelerating inclusive economic growth in the metropolitan Hartford region (<https://bit.ly/34Zr9cz>). It has been approved by the state and federal governments. One major element is maintaining a strong talented workforce:

- **Flexible Training Fund for Rapid Skills Development.** Create a flexible funding source for rapid workforce training led by Industry Sector Partnerships. Based on the Rhode Island model this effort needs \$60-70 million with funding flowing directly to Industry Sector Partnerships (Industry Clusters) through a competitive grant process. Recipients could then purchase training services that they choose.
- **Talent Workforce Dashboard.** Develop a comprehensive labor force data dashboard for both for the state and the metropolitan region that would organize information on training provider output including colleges, universities, adult education, certificate programs, and apprenticeships. This would involve matching training output data to demand data at the state and metropolitan regional level. (See Rhode Island Talent Dashboard: <https://1drv.ms/b/s!AsAn5ocd2LKk1heTpgRDBP361bPg>).
- **Fully Fund Pilot and PRPT.** Support Economic and Environmental Vitality with Full Funding of PILOT and PRPT. Create a statewide PILOT and PRPT Impact Equity (PIE) program to address the heavy impacts felt by some communities because of tax revenue losses due to: State of Connecticut or Connecticut Airport Authority properties and farm/forests; MM&E reimbursement; hospitals and colleges; and Public Act 490 lands. Do not allow the transfer of state forest land to PA 490 valuation. Consider funding the program with a modest increase in sales tax. 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.

Support Testing and Remediation of Crumbling Foundations in the State

Substantial progress has been made in remediating crumbling foundations in the CRCOG and NECCOG regions. To continue this progress, we ask for the following actions to be taken:

- **Extend the Life of the Captive Insurance Organization by Ten Years.** This will allow the captive insurance entity to use the money it will receive over that time from the home insurance surcharge, which will allow for the current suspension on new applications to be lifted.
- **Extend the Life of The Property Tax Assessment Reduction Statute by Ten Years.** This would correspond to the sunset date of the captive insurance organization.
- **Secure Additional Funding for Testing and Remediation.** Authorize an additional 100 million dollars towards crumbling foundations.

- **Concrete Testing Changes.** Request that the Bonding Commission allow testing funds administered by CROG through CT DOH to be used for testing of municipal buildings as well as second visual tests for homeowners who need adjustment in their severity index based on continued deterioration over time. Also allow DOH testing funds to reimburse homeowners who receive visual inspections by CFSIC certified home inspectors.

Strengthen the Role of Councils of Governments

To accelerate shared services at the regional level, Councils of Governments in CT, of which CROG is the largest organization, need stable funding, clear roles and need to be able to secure federal funding designated for counties.

- **Provide Stable Funding for Councils of Governments.** To be vibrant and effective, Councils of Governments need long-term stability in funding. Ultimately, a direct, reliable source of funding, not dependent on either the state or municipalities, is needed.
- **Expand Municipal Shared Services.** Several CROG members were involved in the work of the CT Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations on shared municipal services. The draft report will be presented to the Legislature and contains a series of recommendations. See <https://1drv.ms/b/s!AsAn5ocd2LKk1hjV6cHbcG5h6OqI>. This report contains several recommendations on technology, municipal and K-12 school shared services.
- **Digital Equity: Advance Digital Equity Both Geographically and Economically.** Improve digital equity by requiring Internet providers to provide low-cost service to households with members on the free or reduced lunch program. Assure that emerging 5G coverage is universal and is not only built on population density.
- **Nutmeg Network: Maintain Funding for and Expand the Nutmeg Network.** Currently 36 of 38 CROG towns are connected to the Nutmeg Network. Implement the recommendations of the MORE Commission's Municipal Efficiencies Committee in their 2015 report titled "Transforming Local Government Service Delivery through Technology" (<https://bit.ly/2sNS7FT>). Support expansion of Nutmeg Network to additional towns, libraries and schools in the region.

Maintain Adequate Transportation Funding, and Improve Grant and Approval Processes

Transportation investments are crucial to the metropolitan regional economy. Here are some recommendations to maintain progress on this area in the region:

- **Revenues.** Identify revenues for the Special Transportation Fund 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 our neighboring states use.
- **Capital Funding for Transportation Projects.** Support continued funding for the Town Aid Road Program, Local Bridge Program, and Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTICIP). Support the Interstate 84 Viaduct Reconstruction and Charter Oak Bridge projects as they will provide significant congestion relief, improve safety, and encourage economic development.
- **Expedite Grant and Approval Processes in Transportation.** Develop expedited grant and approval processes for state grants in aid for transportation-related development projects, including LOTICIP and Transit- Oriented Development (TOD) projects. Support the continuation of the LOTICIP program as a successful alternative to STP-Urban federal grants to Municipalities.

- **Modernize Financial and Other Reporting to CT DOT.** Use online systems for financial reporting, federally required plans and project status reports rather than manual paper-based systems.

K-12 Education

K-12 education is by far the largest municipal expenditure. Here are several K-12 recommendations:

- **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. Other options would be to remove the cap on excess cost items and change the burden of proof in the special education assessment.
- **Individual Education Plan (IEP) Appeals Process.** If legally possible, 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.

Local Government Revenue Diversification

CCM has an ongoing property tax study that will include consideration of revenue diversification for towns in the state. To broaden the tax base beyond the very heavy reliance on property taxes, revenue options could include: user fees, development impact charges, and additional conveyance fees.

Increase Environmental Sustainability Initiatives

Support sustainability approach through continuation of energy conservation projects, micro-grids and Zero Emission Renewable Energy Credit projects for Towns and Boards of Education. Increase opportunities for towns to participate in virtual net meetings to eliminate the waiting list. Support Sustainable CT initiative in which many towns and cities in the region participate. Utilize the Volkswagen settlement funds to support municipal charging stations and electric vehicles.

Allow Regional Asset Districts for Metropolitan Regions

Allow for creation of Regional Asset Districts to promote regional recreational and cultural facilities. One example could be funding for Riverfront Recapture that will add additional towns over time and serves recreational needs of the region. Permit regions or towns to enact food and beverage taxes to fund such a district with funds to be distributed by COGs for infrastructure improvements for regional facilities.

Update Prevailing Wage Provisions

CRCOG supports an update of prevailing wage provisions. Along with CCM and COST, CRCOG supports updating the threshold for renovation projects to \$500,000 or higher, as well as 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.