



CRCOG Weekly Legislative Report

2019 Legislative Session

May 16, 2019

Weekly Legislative Feature Issues:

There are just three weeks left in the regular legislative session and the Connecticut General Assembly has continued convening for sessions. As you recall from last week, after a marathon debate, the House passed an increase in minimum wage, but it has not yet been taken up by the Senate. It is worth noting that neither the House nor the Senate have taken action on any other major issues such as tolls, legalization of recreational cannabis, or even the budget.

In a unique turn, Governor Lamont stopped in to a House Democratic caucus on Wednesday, May 15th along with members of the Capitol Press Corps and acknowledged that he had placed many of the members in a difficult position when he had asked them to vote in favor of electronic tolling along four Connecticut highways. For further details on Governor Lamont's visit, here is an article that illustrates what happened: [Lamont: 'I Put Some of You in a Pickle.'](#)

This past week has revealed new developments of particular interest to you:

Editorial: Close the Deal on Tolls, Improve State Ranking

In light of the recently released U.S. News & World Report rankings of the best states to live in with Connecticut being ranked 21 among the 50 states, the Day's Editorial Board reviewed the issue-specific rankings examined what factors continue to hold Connecticut back.

Noting that the state was ranked 3 for access to and quality of health care and 6 for its "natural environment." The state's education system—renowned for its strength in the suburbs and weakness in low-income urban centers---was ranked 12th.

The Editorial Board noted that Connecticut's ranking at 46th in the nation for infrastructure and fiscal stability and 30th for its economy are interrelated. They noted that neighboring states have long used tolls to provide sustainable revenues to maintain and improve their transportation infrastructure, Connecticut abandoned them in 1985. The Board argued that overreliance on the gas tax coupled with a persistent inability to college fees from the millions of out-of-state drivers has not provided enough revenue to improve and expand Connecticut's critical transportation infrastructure.

The Board asserted that finding the means to modernize the state's transportation system is critical to improving its economy. They noted the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut, the Business Council of Fairfield County, the Connecticut Building Trades Council, and the Connecticut Construction Industry Association have all endorsed the imposition of electronic tolls.

Transportation Commissioner Joe Giulietti testified that his agency needs at least \$2 billion annually to maintain and improve the state's transportation infrastructure. The proposal has \$800 million coming from toll collections and the difference from existing fuel taxes and federal matching grants.

The Board argued that the Republican's alternative---Prioritize Progress---is bad fiscal policy. They noted that this plan would borrow \$700 million annually to be repaid out of the General Fund and combine it with the \$700 million the state already takes from the State Transportation Fund to meet debt obligations to cover the state's end before federal matching brings it to the \$2 billion target.

The Board found this to be untenable since it does not tap revenue from out-of-state drivers and requires annual reauthorizations from the legislature and governor.

[The Day: Close the Deal on Tolls, Improve State Ranking](#)

First Crumbling Foundation Repaired with State's Help

The AP reported that work has been completed on the first Connecticut home with a crumbling foundation using funds from a captive insurance company created by the General Assembly in 2018.

Kevin and Aisling McCloskey's basement took about 6 weeks to replace, which was a month shorter than expected. The McCloskey's were very relieved that the work was completed after using a \$175,000 grant from the captive insurance company to pay for the work. There are hundreds of homeowners currently seeking assistance in repairing deteriorating foundations as a result of the presence of pyrrhotite in the concrete.

The captive insurance company's superintendent says that there are more than 80 homes in the pipeline to have crumbling foundations replaced.

[AP: First Crumbling Foundation Repaired with State's Help](#)

Governor Lamont will Support New Funding for Hartford's XL Center that Would 'Keep the Building Alive'

Governor Lamont announced that he will support additional funding up to \$30 million for renovations to the downtown Hartford XL Center in each of the next two years. He also stated that he will be closely examining a public-private partnership that could unload some or even all of the financial burden of the arena from state taxpayers in the future.

House Majority Leader Matt Ritter stated that this is a commitment to the XL Center in terms of state dollars." He added that "[they] are looking at a two-part program here. Bond funds for critical upgrades and repairs; while exploring a public-private partnership for the future."

Ritter noted that the funding could be between \$20 million and \$30 million in each of the next two years, but this funding would still need the approval of the Finance, Revenue, & Bonding Committee as well as the full General Assembly.

This funding does not address the larger issue of a major overhaul that is estimated to cost between \$100 million and \$250 million. This renovation is seen as vital to the venues long-term survival as more modern competitors continue to enter the market.

While Governor Lamont signaled support for the XL Center, he did not include additional funding for the arena in his capital projects proposal in February, which is in line with the debt diet that he vowed to put the state on when he entered office in January.

A spokesperson for Lamont, Maribel La Luz, said "Bonding is not the governor's preference, but he understands the need to address critical maintenance issues to ensure the building remains a viable sports, music, and entertainment venue in the short-term while looking at other options." s

Republicans quickly responded against his statement of support with Senate Minority Leader Len Fasano exclaiming, we're "throwing good money after bad. This has been the same story for the last eight years. We need to sell the place, period."

[Courant: Gov. Lamont will Support New Funding for Hartford's XL Center that Would 'Keep the Building Alive'](#)

Tracked Bills:

Please see attached document.