

CRCOG Legislative Agenda for 2021

The Capitol Region Council of Governments comprises 38 cities and towns and serves one million residents and covers most of historic Hartford and Tolland counties. The legislative agenda for 2021, approved at the December 16, 2020 Policy Board Meeting, is:

- **COVID-19: Facilitate town and regional recovery**
- **Secure transportation funding**
- **Restore crumbling concrete foundations**
- **Council of Government funding and roles**
- **Provide Enabling Legislation for Stormwater Utilities**

COVID-19: Facilitate Town and Regional Recovery

CRCOG has been active since March 2020 in responding to the COVID-19 emergency:

- Activated our Regional Distribution Site plan and distributed more than 20 million pieces of personal protective equipment to our member towns, first responders, schools, and long-term care facilities.
- Led with several COG partners preparation of a 2021-2022 \$10 million EDA grant request with funding for statewide recovery effort
- Stood up with DEHMS Region 3 stood up a regional long-term recovery committee for the CRCOG region

Here are some suggested actions to facilitate the COVID-19 recovery that may take several years:

- **Land Use.** To support recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Planning and Development committee should consider the issue of encouraging the reuse of vacant and underutilized commercial buildings and land. Particular attention should be paid to land and building located along arterial roads or frequent transit service as well as removing barriers to redevelopment.
- **Economy.** Accelerate workforce development efforts by creating a flexible training fund for use by Industry Sector Partnership (ISPs) including police and paramedicine. ISPs are currently being formed by regional business leaders and offer a promising vehicle for prioritizing training funds.
- **Public service modernization. Partly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we should** accelerate modernization of public services in the state and towns and leverage existing systems: GIS regional data systems for land records, online assessing and facilitate local government service innovation and “touchless” service delivery. 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>). One possible source of funding for local public service modernization would be equalizing the conveyance tax of distressed municipalities.

- **Broadband access.** The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a light on the importance of broadband access for K-12 education and for providing “touchless” public services and for businesses. There are geographic gaps in broadband access in rural and urban areas and issues of economic access to available broadband service. CROG requests that the state build on existing measures to further access to broadband across the state. A recent national report on broadband access may be found here:
https://www.benton.org/sites/default/files/BroadbandAmericaNow_final.pdf

Transportation Funding

The Special Transportation Fund (STF) is facing insolvency. The STF funds Department of Transportation operations, transit programs, and the debt on borrowing used for highway, bridge, and rail upgrades. The fund leverages about \$700 million per year in federal aid for infrastructure work. This program must remain solvent to issue bonds to leverage federal funds that underpins much of the transportation work in the state. We ask that the Governor and legislature act to preserve the solvency of the STF as a priority matter in the 2021 session to:

- **Maintain State of Good Repair.** Maintain a state of good repair for our existing infrastructure and transportation investments, much of which is approaching the end of its useful life. Work with CT DOT to expedite LOTCIP program approvals.
- **Fund Capital Improvement Projects.** Fund scheduled necessary projects that enhance our transportation system, particularly ones necessary for economic development including the Greater Hartford Mobility Study, Hartford Line double tracking, projects that promote Transit Oriented Development and include bicycle and pedestrian improvements.
- **Leverage Federal Funds.** Ensure ability to fully leverage current annual federal transportation funding and capitalize on enhanced funding opportunities associated with an anticipated upcoming major transportation infrastructure package.

Restoring Crumbling Concrete Foundations

To continue the substantial progress made in remediating crumbling concrete foundations in the CROG and NECOG region, our ask is to:

- **Extend the Life of the Captive Insurance Organization by Ten Years** (or if securitized funding is made available for the length of time necessary to pay down the bond). This will allow the captive insurance entity to use the funds 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. Provide for the use of

certified home inspectors to verify condition of foundations as part of the application process in addition to licensed engineers.

- **Extend the Safe Homes surcharge funding** and consider the use of securitized surcharge funds to move more quickly to remediate basements on a waiting list.
- **Secure Additional Funding for Testing and Remediation.** Authorize an additional 100 million dollars towards crumbling foundations and allow current testing funding to be utilized for testing municipal owned buildings. Consider expanding and broadening funding sources for foundation remediation.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Small Cities Allocation.** Provide legislation to use 25% of Small Cities Allocation of CDBG loan funds for renovation of crumbling concrete foundations to assist low- and moderate-income homeowners.

Council of Governments Funding and Roles

To accelerate shared services at the regional level, Councils of Governments in CT need stable funding and clear roles.

- **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 required.
- **Expand Municipal Shared Services.** Several CRCOG members were involved in the work of the CT Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations on shared municipal services. The report was presented to the Legislature just before the COVID-19 emergency. It contains a series of recommendations on technology, municipal and K-12 school shared services. See <https://1drv.ms/b/s!AsAn5ocd2LKk1hjV6cHbcG5h6Oql>.

Provide Enabling Legislation for Stormwater Utilities

Allow municipalities to establish local or regional stormwater utilities to help fund this stormwater infrastructure necessary to prevent local flooding and to separate stormwater from sanitary sewer lines. This is a significant issue for Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) member towns in the capital region and other communities around the state. Preventing sanitary sewer overflows is essential to improve water quality in the CT River and Long Island Sound. Massachusetts and Maine have had good experience with local stormwater utilities and can be looked to as a model for efforts here.

References

ACIR (2020). Report to the CT General Assembly.
<https://1drv.ms/b/s!AsAn5ocd2LKk1hjV6cHbcG5h6Oql>.

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