

2021 Metro Hartford Future Annual Update

Introduction

The Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG), the Metro Hartford Alliance (MHA), and the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving (HFPG) developed the Metro Hartford Future Project in 2019. It laid out a vision of accelerating shared and sustained economic growth.

To achieve this vision of inclusive growth, it established three goals:

- **Talent:** Educate, train, and retain talent - with a focus on underserved and underrepresented populations - to better meet the needs of the region's employers and to create jobs paying a family living wage
- **Invest:** Enhance the quality of place amenities throughout our region to retain and attract talent
- **Brand:** Strengthen collaboration to support and promote the region

Black text was included in the previous annual report and blue text indicates new additions.

Progress on Metro Hartford Future

Talent

There were three main strategies for the talent goal in the CEDS. Significant progress was made on all three goals in 2021. The three strategies are:

Create a world-class talent system, using comprehensive labor-market analysis, a workforce skills training fund, and empowered industry-sector partnerships

Significant progress has been made in creating a world-class talent system. In late 2019, Governor Lamont established a revamped Governor's Workforce Council (GWC), which quickly began pursuing new and innovative initiatives. Also, in 2019 and 2020, the Connecticut Economic Resource Center was transformed into AdvanceCT and began working closely with the GWC and the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). Together, these changes to the state's economic development infrastructure helped launch a number of new initiatives and placed a greater emphasis on workforce and talent development that directly relate to Metro Hartford Future. While many elements are a work in progress, here are a few highlights to date:

- **Healthcare Supply and Demand Analysis.** [Following up on the Manufacturing Supply and Demand Analysis](#) conducted in 2020, in early 2021, Capital Workforce Partners, on behalf of the MetroHartford Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (MACH)

Regional Sector Partnership and the Capital Area Pipeline Partnership, commissioned a study of supply and demand for critical occupations in the Healthcare sector.

- **Next Generation Industry Sector Partnerships.** In mid-2021, Capital Workforce Partners and the MetroHartford Alliance co-convened the launch of the Capital Area Tech Partnership (CATP), a Next Generation IT/Technology Regional Sector Partnership. CATP comprises around 40 IT/technology businesses in the Capital area, and is led by representatives from Stanley Black and Decker, Infosys, Accenture, Cognizant, and other major companies. CATP employers have catalyzed \$3.1 million in skills training investments from the CT Department of Economic and Community Development's Tech Talent Fund with employment outcomes targeted for over 250 individuals.

In collaboration with the Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford, Capital Workforce Partners launched a Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics (TDL) Regional Sector Partnership in late 2021.

Significantly increase the supply of talent for high-opportunity industries using a dual-track training model that provides work-based learning, aligned classroom learning, and valuable credentials/credit for students

In early 2019, Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) established the Capital Area Pipeline Partnership (CAPP) in response to the state's Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative (ACI). In an introductory e-mail to CAPP, CWP states: "This regional pipeline skills training initiative will coordinate the efforts of a broad array of partners across North Central Connecticut to provide an employer-responsive mix of customized work-based learning, dual-track, pre-apprentice, apprenticeship and certificate-focused skills training and support services to targeted young adults and high school students."

As part of this initiative, CWP was awarded \$2.2 million in funding from the CT Department of Labor. The funding will be used to Pre-Apprenticeship and industry credential-based training over the next four years in the North Central region for 474 individuals in the Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Construction sectors. 150 in-school youth and 140 adults will be trained in the Manufacturing sector, 124 adults will be trained in the Healthcare sector, and 60 adults will be trained in the Construction sector. Training will be provided by a number of educational partners, including Goodwin University, CT Community Colleges, and high schools.

In 2021, the \$2.2 million Apprenticeship CT Initiative designed through CAPP has been leveraged to support an additional skills training investment of \$1.6 million in Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) to Capital Workforce Partners. These funds, administered by the CT Office of Workforce Strategy and CT Department of Economic and Community Development, were targeted at industry sectors including Healthcare, Manufacturing, Transportation, Construction, and Energy Efficiency.

Hartford Work Based Learning Network (H-WBLN). The H-WBLN, a collaboration between Capital Workforce Partners, Achieve Hartford, City of Hartford, Hartford Public Schools, and a dozen education and community-based organizations, received a \$250,000 JP Morgan Chase grant to further develop dual track, work-based learning programming and

systems building efforts. These strategies are targeted to in-school youth and Opportunity Youth and prioritize career pathways development

Retain talent by connecting college graduates to employers

Retaining college-educated talent was a major goal of the CEDS as the region, and the state, tend to lag other states in this important metric. For a variety of reasons, the state has had a difficult time holding on to the talent it produces at its world-class higher education institutions. The CEDS identified the Campus Philly model as a promising best practice.

Progress toward bringing that model to Connecticut included:

The retention of higher education graduates from Connecticut-based colleges and universities was identified as one of 19 strategies by the Governor's Workforce Council, with the overall goal of building upon the state's talent pool. AdvanceCT was charged with leading the CampusCT initiative with the release of the Governor's Workforce Council Strategic Plan in October 2020.

After a best practice review of national retention programs and consulting with peer organization Campus Philly, the focus of the CampusCT initiative in the Spring of 2021 involved raising awareness of the challenge and initiative with higher education partners and employers, coupled with a search for a vendor to create the mobile platform. With vendor, UpperCampus, secured in July work began on developing the CampusCT mobile platform and the app was launched in September.

During the Fall of 2021 AdvanceCT held scores of formal presentations with higher ed and employers. To date we have 10 employers currently providing content on the app, with 9 employers in progress. We have provided an overview of the initiative to 26 out of the 32 higher education institutions identified. Seven schools are currently participating, reflecting an approximate enrollment of 32,000, with another 5 schools representing 60,000 students coming on board in January.

AdvanceCT participated in several school-based career fairs in the Fall to introduce the initiative and co-hosted a social holiday mixer with HYPE - Hartford Young Professionals & Entrepreneurs.

2022 plans include the launch of a student-led ambassador council to foster a student-driven event and career exploration experience.

CAMPUSCT

ADVANCECT



UpperCampus

Next Steps

- Continue studying workforce supply and demand
- Continue working to strengthen Industry Sector Partnerships

- Continue advocating for a flexible workforce skills training fund
- Continue advocating for additional funding for dual track programs
- Continue supporting CampusCT

Invest

The invest goal of the CEDS had one primary strategy and three long-term strategies. Progress is listed below.

Create a regional investment fund to drive investment in quality of place assets

While this was listed as the main strategy for the “Invest” goal, no significant progress was made during 2021. Due to uncertainties with state funding as well as financial pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, pursuing this strategy was deferred.

The idea of supporting regional quality of place assets is alive and well though. In 2021, Riverfront Recapture contacted CRCOG to begin work on a grant application to support some new regional park assets. Riverfront Recapture plans to apply to the EDA’s Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation program authorized as part of the American Rescue Plan.

Increase connectivity within and outside of the metropolitan region

Progress toward this strategy was made on two fronts during 2021.

- **CRCOG completed an economic impact study of a Boston rail connection:** The Massachusetts Department of Transportation began studying the feasibility of establishing higher-quality passenger rail service between Pittsfield, Springfield, Worcester, and Boston in 2018. The study did not include a complete economic impact assessment as one of its tasks. In 2021, CRCOG completed an economic impact study of the proposed connection, looking at far-ranging impacts job creation and real estate development throughout the corridor. The EIS showed a very strong return on investment (up to 10 to 1). It was released to the public at an event hosted by Congressman Neal (of Massachusetts) and Congressman Larson (of Connecticut).

CRCOG conducted a follow-up study 2021. That study took another look at ridership figures in the MassDOT study. Using an alternative ridership model, with different assumptions regarding potential riders from Connecticut, the study showed a significant increase in potential ridership, nearly 40%. While the study was only done at a “sketch” level, the revised ridership estimates have led to increased calls for MassDOT to reconsider the service. CRCOG continued to share the results of both of these studies with member of the congressional delegations in both Connecticut and Massachusetts.

- **CRCOG initiated a Capital Region Transit Priority Corridors Implementation Strategy Study:** CRCOG initiated its Transit Priority Corridors Study, also known as Metro Hartford Rapid Routes, in December 2020. The purpose of this study is to identify transit priority measures to improve the speed and reliability of transit services in six major Metro Hartford corridors. A consultant team led by Nelson\Nygaard is assisting with the effort. CRCOG assembled a Working Group made up of representatives from CTDOT, CTtransit, Hartford, and East Hartford. This group met twice virtually and also attended an in-person corridors tour and alternatives

development workshop. A larger Technical Advisory Committee, which includes Working Group members as well as additional stakeholders, also met twice in 2021. To date, the Study Team has developed a Review of Plans and Studies; an Existing Conditions and Corridor Selection document; and a Corridor Evaluations Memo. The Study Team also conducted an active transportation audit of approximately 50 bus stop locations within the corridors. These efforts informed the development of improvement options for each corridor. These improvements were reviewed by the Working Group and Technical Advisory Committee, and their feedback will be incorporated. For public engagement, the Study Team developed a website and virtual meeting room (www.metrohartfordrapidroutes.com), conducted a survey, and held virtual public meetings. Additional public presentations as well as in-person engagement at high-ridership locations are anticipated for early 2022.

Support investments in the metropolitan region's downtowns

While many studies on Transit-Oriented Development had previously been completed in the metropolitan area, CRCOG identified one gap and initiated a study to fill that gap:

- **TOD Roles, Visioning, Viability, and Tools Analysis Study:** In 2021, CRCOG initiated a more fine-grained look at advancing TOD in the region. The primary task in the study is to identify sites in each of the towns that may be ready for development, then look at their financial viability. The study is looking at existing zoning and visions for the sites, then performing a market feasibility analysis to determine how realistic that development is. A real estate analysis firm is being brought in to make this determination and developers will be consulted to determine market appetite. The study is underway and as of January 2022, initial site visits have been conducted and the first meeting of the study advisory committee has been held. The study should wrap up at the end of Summer 2022.

Continue making sites ready for development

Within this strategy, two recommendations were made. One was to continue pursuing funding for brownfields assessment and remediation. The other was to pursue funding for infrastructure projects that will make sites more attractive for development. Two notable examples of progress include:

- **2020 Regional Brownfields Assessment Grant:** In 2020 CRCOG was awarded a \$300,000 grant from the EPA to fund brownfields assessments in the region. As of January 2022, CRCOG had selected a consultant to assist with this project. CRCOG also issued a solicitation to the towns for assistance through the program. CRCOG is currently working with potential applicants to identify projects. The funding will assist towns with assessing properties and planning for redevelopment.
- **East Hartford/Goodwin University Drainage Improvements:** In 2020 the Town of East Hartford prepared a grant application for funding from the EDA to improve drainage along Main Street. The area is slated for redevelopment as part of Goodwin University's Campus Master Plan. This development is currently prevented by flooding issues in the area. While EDA funding was not awarded to the project, the town is seeking alternative funding sources for the project and expects to be able to get the project underway.

Next Steps

- Continue exploring options for creating a regional investment fund
- Continue advocating for East-West Rail connection to Boston
- Finish Transit Priority Corridors Implementation Strategy
- Explore opportunities from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law
- Complete TOD Roles, Visioning, Viability, and Tools Analysis Study (scheduled for August 2022)
- Continue pursuing funding through the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development and the federal Environmental Protection Agency
- Continue submitting grant applications for improvements to sites and areas

Brand

The Brand goal of the CEDS focused on increasing awareness of Hartford as a prime location to relocate businesses, as well as a location to start new ones.

Create a coordinated, regional approach to business retention, expansion, and attraction.

In 2019 and 2020, the MetroHartford Alliance began a renewed push to market the region and attract investment. In part funded by a \$1 million DECD grant for 2020 and 2021, the Alliance is undertaking the following activities:

- Developing a talent attraction website
- Developing a branding and marketing campaign
- Sponsoring events such as the Insurance Capital Summit
- Staffing trade show booths
- Paid advertising
- Lead generation
- Others

This work has had a measurable impact in 2020 and 2021. A few highlights include:

- \$290 million in total capital investment
- 2,179 new jobs in the metropolitan region
- Twelve recruitment “wins”
- 400 jobs retained
- 486 local business assists

Scale efforts to support high-opportunity sectors through entrepreneurship.

This strategy relies on the existing successes the region has experienced with sector-based entrepreneurial support systems. Existing business accelerators in high-opportunity sectors are showing successes. These include Stanley + Techstars and Hartford InsurTech. Coworking spaces and incubators include reSET and Upward Hartford. Additional progress includes:

- Digital Health CT launched in November 2019 (partnership between Hartford HealthCare, Trinity, and UConn). This provides support for healthcare startups.

- Launc[H] (innovation places) received \$2.8 million in year 3 funding from the state.

One disappointing development was the discontinuation of the Hartford InsurTech Hub, run in partnership with Startupbootcamp. After three years in existence, the funders of the program decided to hold off on the fourth year due to uncertainty caused by COVID-19.

One bright spot is 2021 was that CRCOG received a grant from the Economic Development Administration, through the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, to, among other activities noted later, hold a series of webinars and entrepreneurial meetups. \$75,000 was allocated to this project.

Additionally, statewide, the General Assembly authorized \$64 million over four years for the Innovation Places program. This funding will be used to recapitalize innovation places projects such as Hartford's Launc[h].

Finally, the state launched a \$100 million competitive grant program called Innovation Corridors. This program seeks to leverage private sector investments in physical developments aimed at increasing entrepreneurship and innovation.

Next Steps

- Support MHA's branding and recruitment efforts with information
- Help evaluate the results of MHA's efforts
- Work with legislators to continue allocating funds to support accelerators and incubators.
- Hire a consultant for the webinar and entrepreneurial meetup project.

Next Steps for Metro Hartford Future

Despite the many disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, a significant amount of work was initiated. In fact, significant progress was made on most of the primary strategies in the CEDS.

In addition to continuing with the studies and initiatives described above, staff recommends the following:

- Update the CEDS to address the COVID-19 pandemic using a \$90,000 grant from the EDA. (scheduled to be completed by December 31, 2022)
- Provide technical support services to small businesses using a \$110,000 grant from the EDA. (scheduled to be completed by August 31, 2023)
- Hire a recovery coordinator to assist with identifying unmet needs in the region related to the COVID-19 pandemic using a \$100,000 grant from the EDA. (scheduled to be completed by August 31, 2023)

Indicators¹

The indicators were not updated for this report due to data availability issues. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Census Bureau has not released a full set of data tables for the 2020 1-year American Community Survey. They have released an “experimental” data set that only includes data at the state level, not the Metropolitan Statistical Area level. Staff considered switching to the 5-year survey, but the release of this data has been delayed until March of 2022.

	2016 Value	2019 Value	5-year Goal (%)	5-year Goal (Value based on 2016)	Progress toward goal
Population	1,206,800	1,204,877	3% - 4%	1,243,000 - 1,255,100	-0.15% population change
GDP	98.6 billion	105.1 billion	5% or more	\$94.5 billion or more	6.6% GDP growth
Disparity – Median Household Income	White, Non-Hispanic: \$80,800 Black: \$45,800 Hispanic: \$37,600	White, Non-Hispanic: \$88,112 Black: \$50,673 Hispanic: \$43,802	> 33% decrease in disparity	Black: \$57,500 Hispanic: \$52,000	Black: 7% increase in disparity Hispanic: 3% increase in disparity
Disparity – Poverty	White, Non-Hispanic: 5.7% Black: 19.3% Hispanic: 28.2%	White, Non-Hispanic: 5.6% Black: 16.3% Hispanic: 25.4%	> 33% decrease in disparity	Black: 14.8% Hispanic: 20.7%	Black: 21% decrease in disparity Hispanic: 12% decrease in disparity
Disparity – Employment Rate	White, Non-Hispanic: 62.7% Black: 59.1% Hispanic: 57.5%	White, Non-Hispanic: 62.5% Black: 60.7% Hispanic: 60.2%	> 33% decrease in disparity	Black: 60.3% Hispanic: 59.3%	Black: 50% decrease in disparity Hispanic: 56% decrease in disparity

¹ Indicators are collected at the Metropolitan Statistical Area level