Capitol Region Council of Governments
2012 Legislative Agenda
As Approved by the CRCOG Policy Board January 25, 2012
Post-Session Review
May 2012

While at present the state budget is narrowly in balance, the state faces significant fiscal challenges going forward. CRCOG seeks to participate in a collaborative effort to resolve the ongoing fiscal challenges facing our state and municipal governments. CRCOG requests that state leadership reach out to the regions and local governments in partnership to address the pressing fiscal situation that is likely to continue for a number of years. CRCOG stands ready to participate in collaborative and thorough discussions on spending, revenues and measures to improve the efficiency of state and local services.

Connecticut State Issues

1. **State K-12 Education Funding.** K-12 education funding makes up a majority of local budgets and is a top concern. A change in funding for education and all inter-governmental aid directly affects overall town budgets. CRCOG supports fair and equitable state funding for local education and requests that impacts of changes on overall town budgets be carefully considered.

   **Status: No base adjustment to ECS.**

   **SB 458 allocates to Alliance Districts $39.5 million in increased Education Cost Sharing Funding to go directly to school districts. Alliance Districts are defined as the 30 lowest-achieving school districts. Eight municipalities in the CRCOG region meet this criteria.**

   **See the attached policy documents for more information.**

2. **Solid Waste Management.** Solid Waste management in Connecticut is rapidly evolving, with the retirement of 70 long-term CRRA municipal contracts in 2012 presenting a unique opportunity for the General Assembly to evaluate solid waste legislation and its applicability to current and future
regulatory and market trends. Specific areas requiring legislative review include the goal that the state be self-sufficient in solid waste disposal, whether the state and municipalities are best served by the certificate of need process which limits the capacity of resource recovery facilities and landfills, and the requirement that the CRRA is required to implement the statewide solid waste plan as developed by CT DEEP, a cost that is born by less than half the municipalities in the State. If CRRA is to continue to have a statewide mandate to implement the plan then the State should bear the burden of the implementation.

In addition, on behalf of its CRRA member towns CRCOG supports increased municipal representation on the CRRA Board by increasing the Board size to fifteen municipal officials from member communities, including ten municipal officials chosen by the participating communities, representing both geographic and community population diversity, five members appointed by the Governor and legislative leadership and elimination of the ad hoc members.

CRCOG fully supports efforts to expand the definition of Tier 1 renewable sources in the state’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) to include energy produced by trash to energy facilities.

**Status:** No statutory changes were made in the composition of the CRRA Board of Directors.

No statutory change was made to have resource recovery derived electricity priced as a renewable source.

2. **Advance Key Transportation and Transit Priorities.** CRCOG appreciates the significant state fiscal effort that will bring the region intercity trains to New Haven and New York City every thirty minutes and five minute frequency at rush hour for the first true rapid transit line in the state. CRCOG strongly supports moving ahead with both inter-city commuter rail and the Hartford-New Britain bus rapid transit projects as a foundation for further economic development and workforce mobility. CRCOG also supports investing in our transportation infrastructure, ensuring a state of good repair is maintained and working to maintain the region’s economic competitiveness. Exploring alternative transportation revenue and State in addressing a backlog of infrastructure needs. We recognize that priorities such as the I-84 viaduct and Connecticut River bridge to name two large needs do not have funding identified at this time.

**Status:** Inter-city rail improvements. No reductions were made in the New Haven Hartford Springfield rail project and the Hartford New Britain bus rapid transit line. An area to address next session is station area funding
for pedestrian safety (platforms and pedestrian bridges) in several Capitol Region towns.

Local bridge funding. A bill was introduced on local bridge funding but was not passed by either chamber of the General Assembly.

Bus rapid transit. Amendments to terminate the bus rapid transit program were defeated in the House and Senate. Project groundbreaking to be held on May 22, 2012.

3. Disaster Preparation and Response: Follow Through on Lessons Learned from Major Weather Events. In the aftermath of two major weather events in 2011 CRCOG stands ready to help advance implementation of any of the 82 recommendations from the Governor's Two Storm Panel or the Witt Report as well as other lessons learned from various state level reviews and CRCOG's own after action analysis.

Status: Emergency Preparedness: Bill SB-passed that requires electric, gas and telephone companies to meet performance standards to better communicate and improve coordination with local officials following storm related events.

5. State Support for Effective and Efficient Regional Planning and Service Sharing. A good deal of state policy over the past five years – including land use, economic growth, transit, and affordable housing –benefit immensely from strong regional planning and implementation capacity. As more tasks will likely be asked of regions in the state going forward, appropriate state support for regional capacity is important for appropriate land use planning, support for transit oriented development and service sharing initiatives.

As part of a study being conducted for the CT Institute for the 21st Century, CRCOG is expected to demonstrate areas of savings through greater municipal and regional cooperation and ways to move forward to take advantage of these opportunities. CRCOG stands ready to take advantage of these opportunities as they are developed.

The reinstitution of the Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP) (CRCOG submitted five grant proposals in the current cycle) and the CT Institute study of greater regional efficiencies should offer steps forward. CRCOG requests that the language be amended or struck in Public Act 11-61, Section 5(2)(A):...the secretary shall give priority to a proposal submitted by (A) any entity specified in subsection (a) of this section that includes participation of all of the member municipalities of such entity,... This has been interpreted by OPM as a preference for 50% more of towns participating in applications for shared
services funding be struck. This disadvantages regions such as CRCOG with 30 towns compared with some regions with as few as 4 towns.

The opening of general government services in towns to federally funded broadband and to the Connecticut Education Network should enable more “back office” efficiencies over the coming decade to build on the success of CRCOG’s online permitting program.

**Standard Chart of Accounts.** As part of education reform standardized chart of accounts for local education was passed and signed into law for better comparison of costs among districts.

**Regional Performance Incentive Grants.** No reductions were made in the approved budget to the program. None of the funds has yet been awarded.

**Regional Tasks and Boundaries.** HF 5154 that would reshape the 15 regional boundaries and consider a broader range of tasks than planning failed to pass the Senate.

6. **Efficient State Services.** CRCOG supports efficiency efforts in all executive agencies to streamline permitting of municipal projects and reasonable approaches to common municipal problems. The projects that are held up in the permitting process represent thousands of Connecticut jobs on hundreds of projects. CRCOG supports the efforts at CT DEEP in regulatory “transformation” and efforts at Connecticut Department of Transportation to speed up approvals of local bridge and highway projects as examples. CRCOG has been a pilot for streamlined efforts in the past and stands ready to do again to facilitate greater timeliness and efficiencies.

**Status: Streamlining Municipal Permitting Projects.** As part of Public Act 11-1, LEAN practices and principles to the permitting processes of DEEP – DECD – DAS – and DOT were initiated.

**Streamlining ConnDOT Processes.** As part of Public Act 11-1, the State Traffic Commission (STC) review process was refined to introduce efficiencies. CRCOG feels a similar process review for municipal projects, using federal monies, should be conducted. No legislation is in place requiring this ‘process-review’ at this time. CRCOG will begin to discuss a LEAN process review of Surface Transportation Program (STP) projects with Connecticut Department of Transportation officials. Initiatives such as completion of a master municipal agreement and a flex-funding pilot project will be suggested.

7. **Revenue Diversification Options for Towns Acting Regionally.** As part of the broader conversation on state-local revenues, spending and service
efficiency, the option for municipalities acting together in a region to use alternative sources of revenues shared regionally should be considered to supplement the very narrow tax base currently available to towns. CRCOG appreciates the efforts to restore the Regional Performance Improvement Program grant funds with new car rental and hotel tax sources. Local option revenues could in small part be pooled at a regional level, both to replace lost state revenue and to advance local and regional priorities such as improved service sharing efficiencies. If there is to be a conversation on broadening of local revenue sources – either directly through local option revenues or revenue sharing from more diverse state sources, CRCOG would ask to be involved as options are considered.

Status: An area to address next session is determining alternative revenue options if state aid to towns is reduced.

8. Prevailing Wage Provisions. CRCOG requests the elimination of the two-tier system that distinguishes between renovation and new construction projects, that the threshold for prevailing wage projects be increased to $1 million, and that the project minimum threshold be indexed automatically to inflation in the construction industry. CRCOG continues to offer support for process streamlining in the named agencies and has volunteered in several cases to be a pilot for streamlining efforts. Much more remains to be done to move to full implementation of streamlining across state agencies.

Status: No changes.

Federal Issues

9. Reauthorization of Federal Transportation Funding. The federal transportation funding bill is due for reauthorization. CRCOG relies on planning funds from the federal bill for substantial support. Connecticut is highly dependent for transportation funding on federal programs. Congress has not made progress on reauthorization of a federal funding bill that provides almost half of CRCOG’s operating funds. Best guess is for level funding through the 2012 Presidential and Congressional elections. CRCOG stands ready to partner with the state and other agencies in a New England wide effort to shape the terms of the bill to meet the needs of a region with aging and heavily used infrastructure. CRCOG specifically advocates for federal funding formulas that recognize the aging and heavily used infrastructure in Connecticut and the compact nature of the state that supports the need for greater investment in intercity rail and rapid transit.

Status: A US House Senate conference committee is meeting on the transportation bill. One of the 47 committee members is from New
England. Most of the policy content has come from the Senate MAP 21 bill and the House has largely passed an extension of the status quo in the policy areas.

10. **Livable Communities and Greenhouse Gas Reduction.** CRCOG was successful in receiving a $4.2 million bi-state, three-region grant for sustainability. Much more is needed to move forward on greenhouse gas reductions and improved livability in pedestrian and bicycle access and more transit related redevelopment. Although the federal program for Sustainable Communities grants has not been extended CRCOG has two years to go on the grant we were awarded. CRCOG looks forward to sharing results of a market study of transit oriented development sites and other research with state agencies and the legislature. CRCOG supports federal funding for priming and supporting sustainable communities efforts in the state.

*Status: The second round of SCR grants was awarded and the initiative was terminated by Congress for future years.*