Connecticut State Issues

1. **State Budget Situation Calls for Involvement and Partnership.** Materials released by CT OPM in November and December 2012 indicate both a short term state deficit issue as well as long term sizable structural deficits for the state budget. CRCOG respectfully requests that the state reach out to local and regional public sector organizations as the budget challenges are faced. With a seat at the table CRCOG and our 30 member towns can be of assistance in looking for ways to streamline spending and find improvements in service delivery. CRCOG seeks to participate in a collaborative effort to resolve the pressing fiscal crisis facing our state and municipal governments. State and local governments in Connecticut are inexplicably tied to one another through our current systems of revenue generation and sharing in an effort to provide critical and required services to our citizens. Any shifts in revenues and services may have substantial and unanticipated impacts. 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 on measures to improve the efficiency of state and local services.

2. **Fair and Equitable 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.

3. **Recasting Metropolitan Regional Organizations Tasks and Boundaries.** State law requires a report recommending boundaries for the state’s 14 regional planning organizations and a set of recommended
tasks for regional organizations be done in 2014. A good deal of state policy over the past five years – from land use to economic growth to transit and affordable housing to name a few – would benefit immensely from strong regional planning and implementation capacity as has been the case at CRCOG for the ten major service sharing projects currently underway. 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. CRCOG supports a careful consideration of revisions to the tasks of metropolitan regional organizations in the state as one pathway for more cost effective services.

4. **Advance Transportation Projects in the Metropolitan Region.** The top two transit priorities of CRCOG for the better part of a decade are currently moving forward: the New Britain to Hartford bus rapid transit line and significantly enhanced rail service from Springfield to Hartford to New Haven and to New York City including greater connectivity to the Bradley Airport. 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. These two projects connect major employment centers in the region and beyond and address the location of 60% of regional freeway congestion in the region. Significant federal funding is being used to advance both of these projects. 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 innovation in streamlining design and construction process will assist the 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. Work is being undertaken to prepare for the replacement of the I-84 Viaduct project that will reunited parts of Hartford and provide important space for development in the city.

5. **Reform Solid Waste Management Framework.** CRCOG and CCSWA have lead an effort involving Mid Connecticut Project towns to provide for an orderly, predictable, efficient, and cost-effective integrated solid waste management system. Early in 2103 a number of important issues will need to be addressed including the continued viability of waste to energy in the metropolitan area and the need to update a revised statewide policy framework in the field after a number of decades of changing circumstances in the field. The General Assembly should 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. 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.

6. **Fair Terms for High Speed Internet Access for Towns.** Federal and state funds including more than $100 million in federal stimulus funding for broadband will in the next 18 months provide access at some point in each of the state’s 169 towns to very high speed internet access. Such internet access is crucial for future efforts at robust disaster recovery and more advanced shared services for towns. CRCOG strongly urges that towns be offered high speed internet access for general government in town at the same rate and terms as other parts of local government and at no greater unit cost.

7. **Efficient State Services.** CRCOG supports 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. Specifically, we support expedited approvals of local bridge and highway projects by CT Department of Transportation and CT Department of Environmental Protection.

8. **Disaster Preparation and Response.** CRCOG recommends vigorous follow through on Learned from three major weather events in 18 months. CRCOG stands ready to help advance implementation of any of the 82 recommendations from the Governor’s Two Storm Panel and the Witt Report as well as other lessons learned from various state level reviews and CRCOG’s own after action analysis. Hardening of cell phone systems has emerged as one specific issue needing to be addressed.

9. **Update the Prevailing Wage Threshold.** CRCOG requests updating the threshold for prevailing wage projects to $1 million, and that the project minimum threshold be indexed automatically to inflation in the construction industry.

10. **Support Amendment to Conveyance Tax Statute.** Support a proposed amendment to CGS Section 12-494 (a) to prevent developers from avoiding the obligation to pay conveyance taxes on the full value of a
piece of residential property and of the home constructed on that property by the developer when the property and home are sold to the new owner(s). Developers have tried to separate these two pieces of the transaction in a way that may permit them to pay conveyance tax only on the value of the land, not on the value of the newly constructed home, thereby decreasing revenue due to the State and Cities and Towns.

**Federal Issues**

11. **Authorization of Federal Transportation Funding.** The recently approved MAP-21 federal transportation funding bill is due to expire in 2104. General funds have been used to supplement gas tax receipts to assure that each state gets at least 95% return for their contribution to the fund. CRCOG will need to work with a number of partners to assure that the region and state emerge from the 2014 federal funding deliberations with the tools to advance sizable transportation needs in the metropolitan region.

12. **Homeland Security Funding.** Federal resources for homeland security for the metropolitan region are in the process of a dramatic reduction over the next several years. While the targeting of federal resources to high priority areas has merit, we need sufficient resources to manage the challenges faced in the region and to be able to act as back up to major metropolitan areas in the case of major episodes.

13. **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. When the Sustainable Communities grant expires in 2014, it will be important to secure federal funds to leverage implementation of the action plans for a more sustainable bi-state region.