Capitol Region Council of Governments

2014 Legislative Agenda

Approved by the CRCOG Policy Board December 11, 2013

Connecticut State Issues

1. State Budget Situation Calls for Involvement and Partnership. Estimates indicate that state budgets will be in recurring deficits of more than one billion dollars starting in 2015. Any shifts in revenues and services may have substantial and unanticipated impacts. CRCOG requests that state leadership reach out to the region and local governments in partnership as these budget challenges are faced. 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. Efficient Local Services. CRCOG is working diligently to support our members to take full advantage of more than $100 million in federal stimulus funding for broadband in the state and has developed a regional back office shared services strategy to leverage this network and to provide better and lower cost services. Continued state support for building out the network and supporting innovative service sharing pilots would help the towns in the region to move forward. CRCOG strongly supports the mission of the M.O.R.E. Commission in the legislature for more cost efficient public services.

3. Efficient State Services. CRCOG supports ongoing efforts in all executive agencies to streamline permitting of municipal projects and reasonable approaches to common municipal problems. The projects that are delayed in the permitting or design processes represent thousands of Connecticut jobs on hundreds of projects.

4. Fair and Equitable State K-12 Education Funding. K-12 education funding makes up a majority of local budgets and is a top concern. CRCOG supports fair and equitable state funding for local education and requests that impacts of changes on overall town budgets be carefully considered. CRCOG further urges careful study of the impact of magnet school funding in the region on school district and town finances and of ways to ensure that there are not
negative impacts of magnet school investments on town school budgets. Unfunded state special education mandates cause the towns and cities great financial hardship.

5. **Council of Government Boundaries and Functions.** On January 1, 2014 CT OPM will propose a set of boundaries for eight councils of governments in the state to replace the former 15. CRCOG believes that many state policy initiatives in areas such as land use, economic growth, transportation, and affordable housing would benefit immensely from strong regional planning and implementation capacity. In addition, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, which form part of the transportation funding system, will be reconfigured following the finalization of councils of governments’ boundaries. CRCOG has supported the CT OPM initiative by accepting nearby towns that wish to voluntarily join CRCOG. CRCOG requests administration and legislative support as COGs integrate new member communities and adjust service boundaries and programs in 2014 and future years.

6. **Advance Hartford Metropolitan Region Transportation Projects.** CRCOG supports investing in our transportation infrastructure, ensuring a state of good repair is maintained and working to maintain the region’s economic competitiveness. The top two transit priorities of CRCOG for the better part of a decade are currently moving forward: CTFastrak New Britain to Hartford bus rapid transit line and significantly enhanced rail service from Springfield to Hartford to New Haven (NHHS) and to New York City including greater connectivity to the Bradley Airport. The CTFastrak rapid transit line is at 50% program completion. 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. Exploring alternative transportation revenue and innovation in streamlining design and construction process will assist the State in addressing a backlog of infrastructure needs.

7. **Future Vision for Rail Transportation.** CRCOG supports the completion of phases two and three of the NHHS rail project including future regular rail service to Boston via improved rail service to Springfield. Greater connectivity to more rapidly growing regions such as Boston and New York is important for the region and the investment can readily be justified.

8. **Reform Solid Waste Management.** CRCOG and CCSWA have developed a system for orderly solicitation of market forces to offer plan options for municipalities within the context of existing practices. CRCOG recognizes the need for waste to energy capacity in the region at least over the next 7 to 10 years while more aggressive solid waste diversion strategies are implemented. CRCOG suggests greater attention be paid to implementation of aggressive solid waste diversion efforts and an update of the solid waste master plan to reflect changing circumstances in the field.

9. **Prevailing Wage Threshold Increase.** 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.** CRCOG supports an 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 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 MAP-21 federal transportation funding bill is due to expire in 2014. Connecticut is more than 70% dependent on this funding source for transportation investments. 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. The CRCOG region needs 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.