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CRCOG Legislative Priorities for the 2007 Session

Based on a survey of CRCOG membership on legislative issues, an October 26 CRCOG Legislative Committee meeting, and approval by the CRCOG Policy Board on November 15, 2006, the following represents CRCOG's legislative priorities for the 2007 session of the General Assembly.

Top Issues for the Region

Two main issues are recommended as legislative priorities for CRCOG in the 2007 session: **transportation** and **inter-town cooperation and municipal service sharing**. In addition, there is a set of issues that CRCOG would be supportive of that come under the general heading of "**regional economic competitiveness**".

Transportation

CRCOG is unique among Connecticut's regions by having two major transit initiatives within its boundaries: the New Britain-Hartford busway and the Springfield-Hartford-New Haven Commuter Rail Service - both of which evolved for CRCOG' Regional Transit Strategy. These two initiatives in turn provide the opportunity for development and redevelopment around these transit stations – so called "transit-oriented development".

- New Britain-Hartford Busway. Support next steps in bringing the busway to fruition now that the final design has been approved including community consultation on issues and emphasizing opportunities related to the facility.
- Springfield-Hartford-New Haven Commuter Rail. Support moving forward on the Commuter Rail Service and work with towns on the corridor in terms of taking advantage of the service for development and redevelopment. Continue efforts to advance Regional Transit Strategy recommendations and related transit initiatives that will enhance this service and give more towns access to this important intercity service. These include better transit connections to east of the river, better connections to Bradley Airport, continuation of the downtown circulator (Hartford Star Shuttle), and improvements to Union Station.

- **Transit-Oriented Development.** Development and redevelopment within a quarter or half mile of a train or bus rapid transit station are referred to as transit-oriented development. In October the Governor's Executive Order 15 put a greater emphasis on transit-oriented development in the region. Support the provisions of the Plan of Conservation and Development for more compact and community respectful development in the region and of capacity building for assistance to the 29 communities in the region.

Inter-Town Cooperation and Municipal Service Sharing

CRCOG has had a long history of supporting inter-town cooperation and service sharing from purchasing to the CAPTAIN system to name only a few. Given constrained town budgets, fiscal pressure makes greater service sharing and inter-town cooperation appropriate. Other state's experiences suggest that there are significant savings opportunities in inter-town cooperation and service sharing to be realized. To assist our member towns CRCOG needs to secure additional resources in several areas:

- **Capacity building.** Staffing town studies and negotiations of inter-town cooperation agreements and of doing background research to explore various options for sharing require additional resources in many cases to fully support these efforts.
- **Incentives.** Offering incentives to come to agreement and put in place inter-town cooperation can save the state money in terms of aid to local governments. State support for shared services through incentives and regional funds for inter-town cooperation and service sharing can help move such efforts along more quickly.
- **Pilot region.** CRCOG offers itself as a demonstration region for innovation in the area of inter-town cooperation with such efforts as a regional GIS system being planned. The state can work with CRCOG as a partner to innovate new inter-town cooperation agreements and new shared services in areas such as shared "back office" information technology, shared assessment service and data systems, to name only a few.

Supportive Issues: Regional Economic Competitiveness

In addition to the two main areas that CRCOG would take a lead in working toward legislative support, CRCOG supports a number of other issues that may be in the agendas of CCM, COST and Capital Workforce Partners. These items fall under the general heading of improving our regional economic competitiveness.

- State capacity. Improve state agency capacity to process permits and deliver projects. Delays in environmental permitting, and in the design and delivery of infrastructure projects are increasing project costs and impeding economic development efforts. Transportation projects are particularly affected with average delays of one year or more. However, the problem extends across all types of public projects, and even adversely affects private sector projects. Creative solutions must be found to this growing problem and will require increasing staff levels in some cases.
- Housing with services or supportive housing and affordable family housing.
- Farmland and open space preservation.
- Education cost sharing formula. Increase state support for education to reduce local property tax burdens.
- Developing and maintaining a skilled workforce for the region.
- Prevailing wage. A \$1 million threshold on prevailing wages with a single tier.
- Binding arbitration. Allowing for more protection for town's fund balances as determining an ability to pay would benefit the towns in earning and upgrading bond ratings from agencies. Modifying binding arbitration allowing the Town Councils/Boards of Selectmen to handle the negotiations would be a positive change.
- Conveyance tax made permanent to help with town finances.
- Clean Water Fund. Support additional resources for the Clean Water Fund with a minimum of \$100 million.