

## Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG)

### **Legislative Agenda for 2026**

The Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) is the largest council of governments (COG) in Connecticut, serving 38 municipalities with a population of nearly one million residents and covering over 1,000 square miles across much of the Hartford and Tolland counties.

CRCOG appreciates the strong partnership it has enjoyed with state leaders and agencies in recent years. As the State of Connecticut continues to modernize service delivery, strengthen communities, and invest in equitable growth, CRCOG seeks continued collaboration to empower municipalities and regions to achieve shared goals.

CRCOG coordinates its Legislative Agenda in close collaboration with other state and municipal partners, including the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR), the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), and the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST). This agenda is subject to adjustment as the General Assembly convenes and new priorities or opportunities arise.

### **Legislative Priorities**

#### 1. Advance a Regional Approach to Housing Growth and Affordability

CRCOG endorses a regional framework for housing growth planning aligned with the provisions of the draft Act Concerning Housing Growth. Key elements include:

- empowering COGs to coordinate and approve Regional Housing Growth Plans under OPM guidance;
- encouraging municipalities to collaborate on shared infrastructure investment, zoning capacity analysis, and priority housing development zones; and
- and supporting the creation of a Housing Growth Infrastructure Fund to align housing targets with sewer, water, and transportation planning.

#### 2. Expand the Uses of the Small-Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP)

CRCOG supports legislation to broaden allowable uses of the Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP), administered by the Office of Policy and Management (OPM), to better reflect the evolving needs of Connecticut's municipalities. Proposed statutory changes would allow regional or inter-municipal projects to qualify for STEAP funding, permit use of funds for planning, technology upgrades, and energy infrastructure

(including EV charging stations and municipal fleet conversion), and simplify application and reporting requirements for smaller towns with limited administrative capacity.

### 3. Energy Siting and Land Use Reform

3a. Municipal Representation on the Connecticut Siting Council  
CROG supports legislation to expand membership of the Connecticut Siting Council to include municipal representation. Adding a local government voice would ensure that community perspectives are considered in the evaluation of renewable energy, telecommunications, and large-scale infrastructure projects. This representation would strengthen coordination between state goals for clean energy and the local land use, zoning, and infrastructure capacities necessary to achieve them.

3b. Preservation of Farmland and Open Space from Renewable Energy Expansion  
CROG supports legislation to prioritize the siting of renewable energy projects on previously developed, disturbed, or brownfield lands and to discourage development on prime farmland, forested tracts, and designated open space.

A balanced approach should:

- Require environmental and land use compatibility assessments prior to siting.
- Encourage dual-use agricultural solar or agrivoltaic projects where feasible.
- Coordinate with the Department of Agriculture and Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to protect working lands essential to Connecticut’s food security and climate resilience.

3c. Establishment of a Maximum Megawatt Cap per Municipality  
CROG supports legislation to create a maximum megawatt capacity cap per municipality for renewable energy installations, proportional to population, available land area, and grid capacity. This cap would promote regional equity in the distribution of renewable energy infrastructure, avoid over-concentration of facilities in certain towns, and encourage shared responsibility for achieving the state’s renewable energy targets.

### 4. Modernize the PILOT Program and Local Revenue Options

CROG supports measures to expand local revenue sources and reform state aid in alignment with CCM’s recommendations. These reforms are critical to ensuring municipalities can maintain essential services without overreliance on the property tax.

Proposals include:

- Increasing the municipal share of the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Fund from \$51 million to \$139 million.

- Expanding PILOT funding for tax-exempt properties to reduce the fiscal disparity between towns with large tax-exempt landholdings and those with limited grand lists.
- Authorizing municipalities to levy a limited tax on nonprofit and higher-education institutions—either based on the assessed value of land holdings or on endowment and investment income—to ensure these entities contribute fairly to the cost of local services.
- Allowing municipalities to retain a portion of the state sales tax and dedicate 1% of the meals and beverage tax directly to towns and cities.
- Increasing the locally retained share of traffic citation and license fee revenue to enhance local revenue streams.

## 5. Enhance Special Education Funding

In alignment with CCM, increase the level of special education funding provided to towns and cities and enact measures that provide meaningful relief from existing mandates:

- a. Specifically, fully fund the Special Education Expansion Development (SEED) Grant from the current \$30 million appropriation to the required \$191 million.
- b. Modify the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) related to special education costs so that expenditures above the base student cost, deficit spending by local school districts and funding provided through the SEED Grant are not included in the calculation of the MBR.

## 6. Transportation and Infrastructure

CRCOG appreciates the State of Connecticut’s ongoing commitment to improving multimodal transportation infrastructure that connects residents, supports job access, and drives regional economic growth. The Capitol Region serves as the nexus of Connecticut’s rail, highway, and transit systems, and strategic investments in these systems are essential to maintaining the state’s competitiveness and advancing sustainable mobility.

### *Hartford Line and Passenger Rail Investments*

CRCOG welcomes the significant investments being made to enhance the Hartford Line and to improve both passenger and freight rail service. The Hartford Line is a vital link between Springfield and New Haven, supporting transit-oriented development, reducing congestion, and strengthening regional connectivity.

CRCOG continues to urge the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) to expedite completion of critical passenger rail projects. Specifically, CRCOG urges CTDOT to complete the design and construction of the West Hartford, Newington, and Windsor stations, as well as full buildouts of the Windsor Locks and Enfield stations, as expeditiously as possible. Additional critical infrastructure improvements include the completion of double-tracking within the corridor and moving toward a corridor-wide Quiet Zone designation.

### *CTfastrak East Expansion*

CRCOG supports the expansion of CTfastrak service eastward to provide reliable and frequent bus rapid transit options to communities that are underserved by fixed-route service. Extending CTfastrak east would expand access to employment centers, higher education institutions, and healthcare facilities, while reducing vehicle miles traveled and advancing the state’s climate and mobility goals.

### *GHTD Link Microtransit Program*

The two-year pilot of Greater Hartford Transit District’s successful GHTD Link program runs through March 2026. CRCOG supports extension of the program and encourages the long-term funding of microtransit service.

The GHTD Link has become a lifeline for residents of Enfield, East Windsor, and surrounding communities—connecting riders to jobs, healthcare, and essential services. CRCOG strongly supports continued state investment in this and other microtransit programs as an innovative and equitable mobility solution for communities that lack the population density to support traditional fixed-route service.

The GHTD Link Microtransit Pilot has demonstrated measurable success as a flexible, demand-responsive mobility option for areas without fixed-route service. Since its launch in April 2024, the service has:

- Averaged over 2,300 trips per month,
- Achieved a shared ride rate of 58%,
- Maintained customer satisfaction at 4.83 out of 5, and
- Delivered on-time performance near 95%

### CRCOG’s Legislative Requests:

1. Extend Funding for the GHTD Link Microtransit Program – Sustained investment is essential to maintain the progress achieved through the pilot program.
2. Expand Funding for Microtransit Programs – Additional investment is essential to meet growing demand for flexible, accessible transportation options.
3. Formalize Microtransit as a Recognized State-Supported Service Type within CTDOT’s transit funding framework to ensure predictable, ongoing support for operations and expansion.

### **Continuing Priorities from 2025**

CRCOG also reaffirms its commitment to ongoing 2025 legislative initiatives, including strengthening investment in multi-use trails, advancing road safety and Vision Zero recommendations, supporting municipal workforce development and shared services, and ensuring sustainable solutions for energy costs and resiliency.