

Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG)

Legislative Agenda for 2026 (12/01/2025 DRAFT)

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. 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.

a. 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.

b. 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.

c. GHTD Link Micro-transit 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 micro-transit 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 micro-transit programs as an innovative and equitable mobility solution for communities that lack the population density to support traditional fixed-route service.

The GHTD Link Micro-transit 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:

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

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.

CRCOG's Legislative Requests:

- 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).
- Simplify application and reporting requirements for smaller towns with limited administrative capacity.

3. Energy Siting and Land Use Reform

a. *Municipal Representation on the Connecticut Siting Council.*

CRCOG 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.

b. *Protection of Farmland and Open Space from Renewable Energy Developments.*

CRCOG supports legislation to prioritize the siting of renewable energy projects on previously developed, disturbed, or contaminated brownfield land 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 agri-voltaic projects where feasible.
- Promote coordination 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.
- Require applicants to contribute 5% (or X%) of the total project cost to the host municipality to support local open space and farmland preservation efforts.

c. *Establishment of a Framework to provide for Local Permitting Authority for Certain Renewable Energy Projects.*

CRCOG supports legislation establishing a fair share threshold, inclusive of all solar generation (grid-scale, roof-top, car ports, etc.) for a maximum megawatt

capacity cap per municipality for renewable energy developments. This threshold would set a maximum megawatt capacity per municipality, scaled to factors such as available land area and energy consumption. This cap would promote regional equity in the distribution of renewable energy infrastructure, prevent over-concentration of large-scale facilities in only a few certain towns, and encourage shared responsibility for achieving the state's clean energy goals.

Once a municipality has achieved their fair share threshold, additional renewable energy projects would become subject to local review and approval, ensuring that future siting decisions are reflective of both state and local priorities.

CRCOG's Legislative Requests:

- Expand membership of the Connecticut Siting Council to include municipal representation.
- Prioritize the siting of renewable energy projects on previously developed, disturbed, or contaminated brownfield land and discourage development on prime farmland, forested tracts, and designated open space.
- Establish a fair share threshold, inclusive of all solar generation (grid-scale, roof-top, car ports, etc.) for a maximum megawatt capacity cap per municipality for renewable energy developments. This threshold would set a maximum megawatt capacity per municipality, scaled to factors such as available land area and energy consumption.

4. Modernize the PILOT Program and Local Revenue Options

CRCOG 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.

CRCOG's Legislative Requests:

- Increase the municipal share of the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Fund from \$51 million to \$139 million.
- Expand PILOT funding for tax-exempt properties to reduce the fiscal disparity between towns with large tax-exempt landholdings and those with limited grand lists.

- Authorize municipalities to levy a limited tax on nonprofits, private-education 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.
- Allow municipalities to retain a portion of the state sales tax and dedicate 1% of the meals and beverage tax directly to towns and cities.
- Increase the locally retained share of traffic citation and license fee revenue to enhance local revenue streams.

5. Enhance Education Funding

In alignment with CCM, CRCOG supports increasing special education funding and adopting reforms that deliver sustained, predictable relief for municipalities.

CRCOG's Legislative Requests:

- CRCOG supports fully funding the Excess Cost grant and adopting a data-driven inflation adjustment to account for rising costs of providing educational services.
 - Use an inflation factor tied to the allowable growth under the state spending cap (greater of inflation or 5-year personal income growth)
 - Ensure districts receive predictable, annually adjusted support that reflects real cost increases. Implement protections to mitigate mid-year recissions.
- Reform the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR)
 - Exclude expenditures above the base student cost
 - Exclude deficit spending
 - Exclude Excess Cost grant funding from MBR calculations
- Support a Student-Centered Funding Approach. CRCOG supports a student-centered funding model consistent with CCM proposals, including:
 - A 4-year phase-in to fully expand ECS weighted funding to students attending all public schools of choice
 - A phase-out of general education tuition billing for magnet and Agriscience programs

Continuing Priorities from 2025

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

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