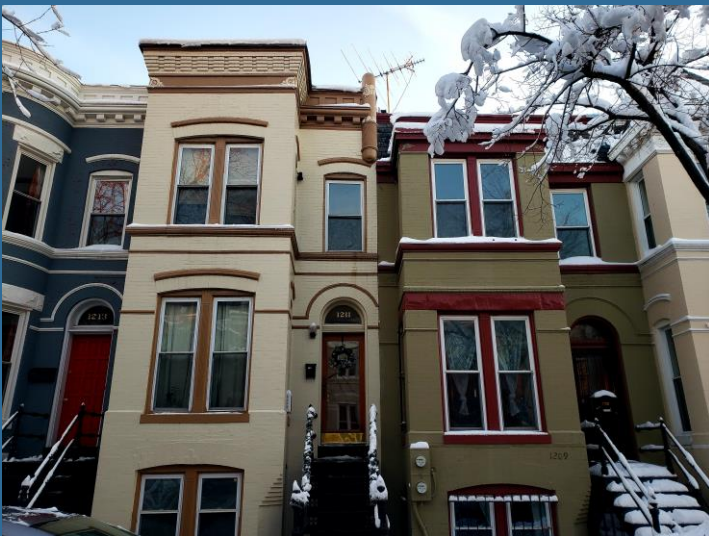


LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Supporting the region's transportation funding, housing, water quality, climate resiliency, air quality, human services, public health preparedness, homeland security, food security, infrastructure investment and incorporating local government input and equity considerations across all sectors

January 2024



Metropolitan Washington
Council of Governments

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

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ABOUT COG

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is an independent, nonprofit association that brings area leaders together to address major regional issues in the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia. COG's membership is comprised of 300 elected officials from 24 local governments, the Maryland and Virginia state legislatures, and U.S. Congress.

CREDITS

COG 2024 Legislative Committee

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TRANSPORTATION FUNDING, PLANNING, & CONNECTIVITY

Support Re-setting Levels of Subsidy Payments to Metro

Subsidy payments from WMATA members should be reset to account for the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on operating costs and should serve as the baseline subsidy for future calculations. With no explicit authorization from Maryland and Virginia to reset the subsidy levels, the reduced subsidy levels from FY2021 have become the base amount for applying the annual three percent increase. As a consequence of this WMATA estimates the operating subsidy for FY 2025 would be lower than what it would have been by about \$196 million. Additionally historic levels of inflation, binding labor agreements related to the increase in labor costs during this period have created an additional deficit of about \$266M. The result is that WMATA's base budget reflects where the system was several years ago. As such WMATA funding partners must take legislative action to authorize WMATA to reset the operating subsidy baseline to account for the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on operating costs. WMATA funding partners should be prepared to provide the additional subsidy amounts resulting from the re-set subsidy levels. Given the existing shared funding responsibilities in Virginia, the state should play a large role in contributing to the adjusted levels of subsidy payments.

Support Federal Funding for the Region's Metro System

The Metro system is the centerpiece of the metropolitan Washington transportation system and forms the backbone of its economy. Almost half of all federal employees use the Metrorail and bus system to commute to work. The federal government should act to permanently provide a larger share of both operating and capital funding for the Metro system, which its employees and the region depend on. Specifically, support making the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) funding permanent to fund the federal government's annual appropriations for Metro's capital improvement budget and designating additional federal funds to support Metro's operations serving the federal workforce and the nation's capital.

Support Fixing the Deficit in the Federal Highway Trust Fund

For more than two decades the federal Highway Trust Fund (HTF) revenue has been insufficient to fund the congressionally authorized surface transportation program. These shortfalls have been closed with transfers from general fund and other short-term measures, including in the recent reauthorization for federal transportation spending through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). The Congressional Budget Office projects that the balance in both the highway and transit accounts of the Highway Trust Fund will be exhausted in 2028. Support addressing this structural deficit and systemic imbalance of the HTF revenues as a top priority to provide certainty of federal funding for the surface transportation program and ensure that any fix to the HTF revenue structure retains all the programs included in the 2021 IIJA and fully funds them at levels authorized or previously envisioned.

Support Equitable Transportation Access & Mobility Solutions

The region continues to strive to better understand the nature of transportation inequities through its analyses in areas such as Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs) or disadvantaged communities identified under the federal Justice40 initiative. As part of the preceding priority to support the Visualize 2045 Long-Range Transportation Plan, particular support is needed for those solutions that address disparities in disadvantaged communities throughout the region.

Support Funding for Next Generation Transportation Systems

The need for a more efficient and safer means of surface transportation is imperative to help achieve the nation's safety, energy-efficiency, and environmental goals. Automated and autonomous vehicles and clean fuel vehicles including electric and hydrogen fuel vehicles, are critical elements of delivering safe, efficient, and environmentally sustainable mobility. The private sector has made significant investments to advance deployment of vehicles using alternative modes of energy and technology. Significant public sector investments are needed to prepare transportation infrastructure to facilitate the operations of these advanced technology vehicles to realize the energy, environment, and safety benefits they offer. Support and expand the continuation of federal funding for building electric vehicles and other advanced technology infrastructure, beyond the term of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Support Roadway & Pedestrian Safety

Safety on our roadways and for our pedestrians and bicyclists constitutes a longstanding and unfortunately worsening challenge for our region, especially the recent tragic increase in pedestrian deaths. Increased support for the “E’s” of safety is needed: engineering, education, enforcement, emergency medical services, and equity, in accordance with the Federal Highway Administration’s “Safe System Approach”. Additional resources, innovative practices and technology, and enhanced safety laws are needed to combat this crisis. Specific initiatives should include improving the ability to hold drivers accountable for their actions across state lines; more effective traffic enforcement and penalties; and consideration of the safety of people outside of vehicles in vehicle designs, standards, and ratings. Vision Zero-supportive laws and practices across the country and around the world have shown success in reducing fatalities and should be emulated and adopted here.

Support the Visualize 2045 Long-Range Transportation Plan

The region has identified a set of strategies to improve mobility and accessibility while also improving regional air quality and reducing greenhouse gases. These strategies include reducing single-occupant vehicular travel; increasing transit ridership and ridesharing; substantially improving roadway safety; bringing jobs and housing closer together; increasing travel by walking and bicycling; and deploying a network of public-access electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Support actions at the local, state, and federal level to fund projects and programs and to enact policies that help realize the TPB’s goals and strategies.

Support the Repeal of Current Participation Limitations on WMATA Board of Directors Alternates

Support the repeal of VA Code § 33.2-1526.1(L) which currently results in a reduction of funding if WMATA Alternate Directors participate in board or committee meetings when directors are present. After amendment of this statute, support the amendment of WMATA Bylaws Article II.11 and Article III.3.a, and otherwise as necessary, to allow Alternate Directors to participate in all board and committee meetings irrespective of the presence of the alternate’s respective Director. The current limitation on Alternate Directors restricts their ability to access the necessary information and knowledge to effectively serve in their roles as WMATA Board Alternate Directors.

CLIMATE RESILIENCY & AIR QUALITY PROTECTION

Support Policies to Meet the Region's Climate Goals

Expand funding, programs, and legislation at federal, state, and local levels to help meet the region's medium- and long-term objectives in climate change mitigation. Ensure that local governments are recognized and given opportunities to provide timely and meaningful input on climate and clean energy programs.

Support Multi-Sector Actions to Reduce Greenhouse Gases

The region and its member jurisdictions are committed to addressing the adverse impacts of climate change including reducing the amount of harmful greenhouse gases (GHG) released in the atmosphere. Support actions across all sectors to help meet the region's 2030 climate and energy goals. Support federal engagement and continued funding to monitor the impacts of climate investment programs and GHG performance measures.

Ensure Sustainable Secure Energy Access for All

Advocate for state and federal actions to enhance access to secure, affordable clean energy. Prioritize and protect funding for energy-sector infrastructure to improve affordability, resilience and reliability. Support policies, funding, and incentives for energy efficiency improvements such as microgrids, district energy systems, and clean energy storage technology. Prioritize funding for upgrading energy infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events and to protect investments in grid technologies that improve energy efficiency and management. Emphasize the need for deployment and workforce development in low-income, energy-burdened, and vulnerable communities to ensure a just and equitable climate future for all.

Support Aggressive State Renewable Portfolio Standards

State Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS) are the most successful method of increasing the amount of renewable electricity generated within a grid system and drives greater deployment of renewable energy projects. Protect existing and advocate for more aggressive state RPS and the innovative policies and programs, business models, and funding opportunities that support meeting the RPS, such as supporting a strong REC market, solar carve-outs in RPS policies, offshore wind, Community Choice Aggregation, and community solar opportunities for energy-burdened households.

Expand Clean Energy Innovation, Technology & Finance

Encourage and support investment in energy innovation across sectors to increase energy efficiency and transition to clean energy sources. Expand options for and improve access to clean energy finance at the state and local levels such as green banks. Advocate for further investment in and deployment of capital through green banks. Foster cost effective and efficient market frameworks, reasonable regulatory frameworks, business model innovation incentives and partnerships that expand the adoption of energy efficient and zero energy building codes, building benchmarking, clean energy technologies and infrastructure, and zero-emission vehicles.

Support Aggressive Energy Efficiency Goals

Encourage and support state, county, and local energy efficiency programs to reduce energy usage, costs, and associated greenhouse gas emissions. Advocate for aggressive initiatives to target households with high energy burdens. Prioritize weatherization, deep energy retrofits, and retro-commissioning programs to achieve the highest possible energy performance and preferably zero energy buildings within Equity Emphasis Areas and climate vulnerable communities of concern.

Enhance Incentives & Financing Mechanisms for Resilient Infrastructure

Support legislation, incentives, financing, and funding mechanisms to support deployment of grey and green infrastructure resilient to extreme heat, flooding, and other climate hazards. Priority resilient infrastructure initiatives include the establishment of resilience hubs in climate vulnerable communities, improve the resilience of critical infrastructure (transportation, communication, energy and water system assets), equitably address urban heat island, enhance green infrastructure networks, provide for tree planting and preservation on privately owned lands, and implement measures to reduce flood risk in climate vulnerable communities. Support measures to reduce flood risk in climate vulnerable communities, such as restoring wetlands and enhancing green infrastructure augment and improve stormwater management.

Support Policies that Preserve & Protect Regional Air Quality and Public Health

Support strong policies, regulations, and funding necessary to preserve improvements in air quality and strengthen the region's ability to meet current and future air quality standards that are protective of public health and welfare. Incorporate an environmental justice and racial equity lens into policies, programs, and initiatives. Support local member efforts to identify and implement initiatives to reduce air pollution. Support regulatory actions to monitor and reduce air pollution transport into the region.

WATER QUALITY PROTECTION

Support Investments in Water Infrastructure & Water Quality Protection

Support appropriating the full authorized funding levels for water, wastewater, stormwater, and water reuse programs, including the Clean Water and Drinking Water SRFs, the EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program, the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA), Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA) and for state programs including grants for local governments and water utilities, and stormwater local assistance funds. Keep state revolving funds (SRFs) at maximum authorization in federal law. Ensure that funding for congressionally directed spending projects is in addition to the authorized SRF funding levels. Ensure that local water infrastructure investments to meet water quality permit load allocations and handle future population and economic growth are protected. Invest in workforce training and development to ensure the availability of skilled workers to fill water sector jobs. Support funding for agricultural conservation programs.

Support Climate & Resiliency Initiatives

Support funding and policy to address robust scientific climate change analysis, adaptation and resiliency planning and coordinated local best practices for flood control, drought, and water storage and reuse. Support drinking water security and resiliency through research, planning, programs and funding to ensure a resilient, reliable, and clean drinking water supply for the region.

Ensure Regulatory Feasibility & Flexibility

Support actions that provide for flexible implementation and a feasible pace for future stormwater, water, and wastewater permits and other regulatory requirements, including reasonable reporting requirements. Support cost-effective scheduling and financing of water quality programs including streamlining permits, flexibility to achieve nutrient and sediment reduction across wastewater, stormwater, and other sectors to protect affordability of water.

Ensure Local Government Input

Ensure that local governments and wastewater and drinking water utilities are given opportunities to provide timely and meaningful input on legislation and management decisions affecting the Chesapeake Bay and local water quality.

HOUSING AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Support Efforts to Equitably Increase the Supply of Housing & Promote Housing Affordability

Support legislation and programs (such as the 2023 provisions of the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act and Neighborhood Homes Investment Act) to preserve and increase the supply of housing and housing choices to address the full spectrum of need in our region. Ensure that a sufficient supply of housing is preserved and produced as outlined in COG's 2030 Regional Housing Initiative targets including a diverse range of housing unit types, sizes and price points that are affordable for our residents in the region's identified Activity Centers and Equity Emphasis Areas. Support efforts to eliminate barriers to the production of fair and affordable housing by encouraging new financing tools, streamlining development processes, and creating innovative regulatory reforms, such as adaptive re-use of commercial space, that results in the production of a greater variety of housing types and eliminate exclusionary zoning practices. Support legislation, policies, and practices that increase access to opportunity, reverse segregation, and create inclusive communities in concert with efforts to increase supply overall.

Support Efforts to Prevent & End the Experience of Homelessness

Work with federal, state, and local Continuums of Care throughout the region to ensure that the experience of homelessness is rare, brief, and nonrecurring through implementation of a racial equity - informed "Housing First" approach. Support increasing the supply of deeply affordable and supportive housing with wrap-around services that promote housing stability and independent living, including strategies listed above. Voice the need for additional HUD funding for Housing Choice Vouchers to meet the need for permanent housing options as well as robust state and federal resources for local governments to provide necessary supports, such as case management, housing counseling, and navigator services to protect vulnerable residents. Support legislation such as the Housing Alignment and Coordination of Critical and Effective Supportive Health Services Act (ACCESS) to align housing and health care resources and clarify how federal funds can be used by homeless services providers to build their infrastructure to bill Medicaid for reimbursement. Support funding for financial rental assistance and legal aid to tenants, landlords, and moderate-income homeowners to prevent a significant increase in evictions and people experiencing homelessness.

Support Alignment of Workforce Development & Job Creation

Support federal legislation to focus on workforce development and job creation at the local level, and efforts to develop industry standard credentialing and skills programs for sectors experiencing job growth in the region. Support legislation and programs that fund local job development, career and technical education, and overall, more closely align education and job creation.

Support Local Governments & Activity Centers

Work with local governments to support sound land use planning which focuses on employer retention and new job growth in the region's mixed-use Activity Centers.

HOMELAND SECURITY AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Public Health Response

Support funding for public health to prevent, prepare for, and respond to public health emergencies and pandemics, such as the COVID-19 crisis. Leverage new and existing funding mechanisms that would provide resources to carry out public health surveillance, reporting, infection control, vaccine distribution, laboratory testing, mass care, planning and exercises, communications and other public health activities. Invest in an adequate workforce capacity and capability to support public health infrastructure. Enact and support the development of more secure supply chain networks, with a focus on vulnerable populations, as it relates to personal protective equipment (PPE) and other life safety equipment used in the response of pandemics.

Support Cybersecurity Preparedness Initiatives

Support cybersecurity programs and initiatives that advance and improve cyber preparedness and response to current and emerging threats. Work with local and state partners to develop resiliency against future cybersecurity attacks and other virtual threats targeted at our citizens and the information technology infrastructure of our communities.

Support Regional Emergency Preparedness

Continue to support emergency response preparedness programs that advance and improve response preparedness to existing and emerging threats. Work with local and state partners to maximize the region's share of federal grant funds and use these funds to promote value added outcomes that continue to increase capacity, capability, and developed standards for regional response in the National Capital Region.

Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Funding

The National Capital Region (NCR) receives UASI funding for efforts to address the multi-discipline planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercise needs of high-threat, high-density urban areas, and to assist in building and sustaining capabilities to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from threats or acts of terrorism using the whole community approach. As funding allocations are assessed, policy makers should recognize the complexity of challenges in the NCR that directly impact Federal government operations and security and support an increase in UASI funding to our region to effectively address the unique nexus of U.S. Federal, state, local, and international operations.

Support Resources for Violent Crime Reduction

Provide resources at the local, state and federal level to support the development, implementation and evaluation of strategies to prevent, intervene in, and respond to violent crime. Specifically, gun violence and the associated trauma inflicted on communities. Continue to provide Department of Justice grant funding to support violent crime reduction efforts at the local level.

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Support Efforts to Combat Substance Use Disorders

Work with local, state, and federal partners to increase resources to combat substance use disorders for all ages throughout the region which may include improving access to treatment and recovery services, promoting prevention education, reducing the stigma of drug disorders, supporting research on pain management, and ensuring awareness of overdose-reversing drugs.

Increase Availability of and Access to Mental Health Services

Work with local, state, and federal partners to increase access to and availability of mental and behavioral health services throughout the region to include psychiatric hospital beds, counseling, telehealth, and other outpatient services; support culturally competent providers from diverse backgrounds; develop communication strategies to combat mental health stigma and promote mental wellness throughout communities; continued expansion of crisis intervention, mental health courts, and diversion programs, where treatment is indicated rather than incarceration, especially for at-risk youth; and re-entry programs to reduce recidivism rates of mental health consumers.

FOOD SECURITY & HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

Strengthen Programs that Support Childhood Nutrition & Well-being

Use federal, state, and local legislative efforts to make access to school meals free for all students. Extend, expand, and simplify programs such as Summer EBT and the Summer Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). Enhance and expand the Women Infants and Children (WIC) Program. Support other policies which reduce childhood poverty and food insecurity, including local, state, and federal Child Tax Credits. Strengthen farm-to-school programs and investments to connect the region's farmers with schools and childcare facilities. Support policies to provide healthier food and drink options on restaurants' children menus.

Improve Food Security & Healthy Food Access

Support federal, state and local initiatives/investments to increase food and flexible cash assistance to residents in need, including children and their families, college students, adults, and seniors. Increase participation in federal benefit programs, streamline program administration and support and evaluate innovative initiatives to serve residents not eligible for federal programs. Make permanent funding increases to SNAP to address food inflation and participants' nutritional needs, including reauthorization of the Farm Bill. Support revenue generation policies to fund supplemental benefits for SNAP recipients at the local and state level, including leveraging tax policies such as an extreme wealth tax. Support the on-going modernization of SNAP to include increasing information security for SNAP participants and decreasing the incidence of SNAP outages. Create a means to replace funds for participants experiencing fraud or theft. Enhance SNAP acceptance among small and or local vendors through technology innovation and dissemination. Support policies and investments that address disparities in wealth and rates of food insecurity in people of color, including Black and Hispanic/Latino households. Increase investments in programs that improve access to local and regional healthy food, including access on college campuses, at food banks and

pantries, farmers markets and CSAs, food hubs, grocery, and in food as medicine programs. Recognize the hunting and fishing rights of indigenous people.

Support Small Farmers & Food System Resilience

Address issues such as Heirs Property which contributes to land loss among low-income people. Support local government efforts to increase farmland preservation, protect agricultural soils, and support programs that facilitate land transition to the next generation of small farmers. Center the unique experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in legislative proposals, and policy and program development to facilitate greater access to land ownership, capital, and markets. Support resources and policies that promote values-based group purchasing and institutional procurement initiatives from the region's farms. Invest in regional food system infrastructure and capacity to increase resilience.

Support Local Food Entrepreneurs, Businesses, & Workforce Development

Strengthen programs that support entrepreneurialism, cooperative development, workforce development, and living wages in the regional food economy. Invest in local business development and ownership and target those investments to help address long-standing food system inequities faced by communities of color. Create career pipelines for food and agriculture workers and improve the health and safety of work environments.

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