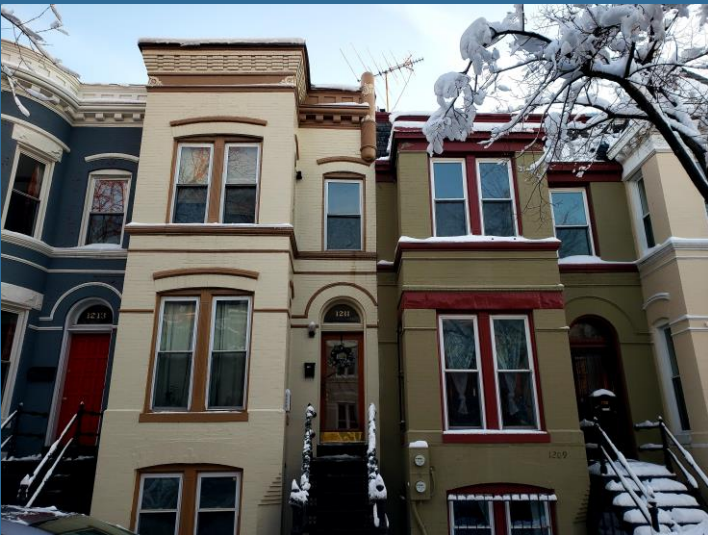


# LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

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

January 2022



## **LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

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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**

Editor: Monica Beyrouti Nunez

Contributing Editors: Steven Bieber, Heidi Bonnaffon, Hilary Chapman, Maia Davis, Jennifer Desimone, Katherine Dyer, Jeff King, Janele Partman, Jennifer Schitter, Lindsay Smith, Kanti Srikanth

COG 2022 Legislative Committee:

Christian Dorsey, Arlington County, COG Board of Directors (Committee Chair)

Reuben B. Collins II, Charles County, Transportation Planning Board

Robert Day, College Park, Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee

Deni Taveras, Prince George's County, Climate, Energy, and Environment Policy Committee

Amy Jackson, City of Alexandria, Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Policy Committee

Andrea Bailey, Prince William County, Human Services Policy Committee

Will Jawando, Montgomery County, Region Forward Coalition

Mary Cheh, District of Columbia, Food and Agriculture Regional Member Policy Committee

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# TRANSPORTATION FUNDING, PLANNING, AND CONNECTIVITY

## Support Fixing the Deficit in the Federal Transportation Trust Fund (TTF)

Since 2008, the TTF 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 the recently enacted reauthorization for federal transportation spending through the Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act (IIJA). Support addressing this structural deficit and systemic imbalance of the TTF revenues as a top priority to provide certainty of federal funding for the surface transportation program and ensure that any fix to the TTF revenue structure preserves the additional funding for transportation infrastructure included in the 2021 IIJA.

## Support Federal Funding for the Region's Metrorail System

The Metrorail system is the centerpiece of metropolitan Washington transportation system and supports 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 its share of both operating and capital funding for the Metrorail system that 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 designate additional federal operating funds to enable Metro to implement fare relief programs on its rail and bus services to address inequities experienced by the traditionally underserved transit dependent population.

## Support Funding for Next Generation Transportation Systems

The need for a more efficient and safer means of transportation is imperative to help achieve the nation's safety, energy-efficiency, and environmental goals. Electric and Hydrogen fuel vehicles and semi and fully autonomous vehicles are critical elements of delivering safe, efficient, and environmentally sustainable mobility. The private sector has made significant investments to advance the use of vehicles using alternative modes of energy and technology assisted vehicle operations. Significant public sector investments are needed to prepare transportation infrastructure to be able to utilize and support the new technology to build the next generation of transportation systems where travel is more efficient and safe. Support the continuation of federal funding for building electric vehicle infrastructure, beyond the term of the Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act.

## Support Traffic Incident Management Improvements

Support state and federal policy changes to improve regional traffic incident management by updating regional agreements to increase the consistency of traffic incident management laws. Specifically, support legal and policy changes to designate transportation incident responders as emergency responders, allowing the use of flashing lights and sirens to get to incident scenes across state lines more quickly. Encourage federal, state, and local governments to negotiate an agreement for funding and deployment of roadway service patrols on federal parkways and other critical major roads not currently benefiting from such patrols.

## **Support the Visualize 2045 Long-Range Transportation Plan**

The region has identified a set of strategies to help improve mobility, accessibility while also contributing to improving regional air quality and help reduce greenhouse gases. These aspirational initiatives endorsed by the region's Transportation Planning Board as part of *Visualize 2045*: Bring jobs and housing closer together; Expand bus rapid transit and transit ways; Move more people on Metrorail; Provide more telecommuting and other options for commuting; Expand express highway network with bus rapid transit and carpools exempt from tolls; Improve walk and bike access to transit; and Complete the National Capital Trail. Support actions at the state and federal level to fund projects and programs and support enactment of policies that help advance the potential improvements of these initiatives.

## **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. Subsequent to 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 limitations on Alternate Directors restricts their ability to access the necessary information and knowledge to effectively serve in their roles as WMATA Board Alternate Directors.

# **WATER QUALITY PROTECTION**

## **Support Investments in Water Infrastructure**

Support sustained and expanded funding for EPA's water quality programs, including the Chesapeake Bay Program and the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) and for state programs including grants for local governments and water utilities, state revolving funds (SRFs), and stormwater local assistance funds. Ensure that local water infrastructure investments 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 Climate and Flood Resiliency Initiatives**

Support funding to address robust climate change analysis, adaptation and resiliency planning, flood control and management, drought management, and development and coordinated implementation of local best practices.

## **Ensure Stormwater Regulatory Feasibility**

Support actions that provide for a feasible pace for future MS4 stormwater permits and reasonable reporting requirements.

## **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.

## **Support Affordability and Regulatory Flexibility**

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, affordability of water, and full funding for agricultural conservation programs.

## **Support Water Supply Security**

Support water quality security and resiliency through research, planning, and programs and drinking water source protection policies and programs to ensure a resilient, reliable and clean drinking water supply for the region.

# CLIMATE AND ENERGY INNOVATION & 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 climate change goals. Ensure that local governments are recognized and given opportunities to provide timely and meaningful input on climate and clean energy programs.

## **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. Emphasize the need for deployment and workforce development in low-income, energy-burdened, and vulnerable communities to ensure an 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 and Finance**

Encourage and support investment in energy-sector 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. 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 the Transportation Climate Initiative in designing and taking actions to reduce Greenhouse gases**

The region and its member jurisdictions are committed to addressing the adverse impacts of climate change including reducing amount of harmful greenhouse gases (GHG) in our atmosphere. Transportation sector, including air, rail and roadway, is a major contributor of greenhouse gases. Transportation strategies with the potential to reduce the amount of these harmful gases are most successful and effective when implemented across multiple localities, regions, and states. The Transportation Climate Initiative (TCI) is a regional collaboration of 12 Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states and the District of Columbia working to develop implementable programs in the areas of Sustainable Communities, Freight Efficiency, Information and Communication Technology and regional policies such as the Cap and Invest program. The Governors of Maryland and Virginia and the Mayor of the District of Columbia are encouraged to continue their proactive participation in the

TCI to help to reduce GHG emissions in the transportation sector. The legislatures at the federal, state and local levels must make every effort to support implementing the programs as a priority.

## **Enhance Incentives and 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 Policies that Preserve and 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. Expand efforts to increase and speed adoption of low-emitting technology solutions.



## **HOUSING AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES**

### **Support Efforts to Equitably Increase the Supply of Housing and Promote Housing Affordability**

Support legislation and programs (such as expansion of the nine percent Low Income Housing Tax Credit allocation and increased HOME funding) to preserve and increase the supply of housing and housing choices to address the full spectrum of needs in our region. Ensure that a sufficient supply of housing is preserved and created as outlined in COG's 2030 Regional Housing Initiative targets, that provides a diverse range of housing units, including size and price points that are affordable for our residents in the region's identified Activity Centers. Encourage innovative regulatory reforms that result 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 expanded funding for renters, landlords, and moderate-income homeowners caused by hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic recession to keep people stably housed and prevent an eviction and foreclosure crisis.

### **Support Efforts to 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 supportive housing with wrap-around services that promote housing stability and independent living. 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 continued financial rental assistance to tenants and landlords to prevent a significant increase in people experiencing homelessness as federal and local eviction moratoriums end.

### **Support Alignment of Workforce Development and 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 and 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.

# FOOD SECURITY, HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

## Strengthen Programs that Support Childhood Nutrition and Well-Being

Build on lessons learned during COVID-19 through the upcoming Childhood Nutrition Reauthorization Act, and other federal, state, and local legislative efforts, to work to make access to school meals free for all students. Extend programs such as Pandemic EBT (P-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. 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 and Healthy Food Access

Support federal, state and local initiatives to increase food and cash assistance to residents in need, including children, 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. Support policies and investments that address disparities in 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 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 and 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. Invest in regional food system infrastructure and capacity to increase resilience.

## Support Local Food Entrepreneurs, Businesses, and Workforce Development

Strengthen programs that support entrepreneurialism, 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.

## Support Efforts to Combat Substance Use Disorders

Work with local, state, and federal partners to increase resources to combat substance use disorders, including opioids, 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 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.

## **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.

## **STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION**

Legislative Priorities: Monica Beyroui Nunez, [mbeyroui@mwkog.org](mailto:mbeyroui@mwkog.org), (202) 962-3212

Transportation: Kanti Srikanth, [ksrikanth@mwkog.org](mailto:ksrikanth@mwkog.org), (202) 962-3257

Water & Food Security: Steven Bieber, [sbieber@mwkog.org](mailto:sbieber@mwkog.org), (202) 962-3219

Climate & Energy: Jeff King, [jking@mwkog.org](mailto:jking@mwkog.org), (202) 962-3238

Housing and Human Services: Paul DesJardin, [pdesjardin@mwkog.org](mailto:pdesjardin@mwkog.org), (202) 962-3293

Emergency Preparedness: Scott Boggs, [sboggs@mwkog.org](mailto:sboggs@mwkog.org), (202) 962-3268