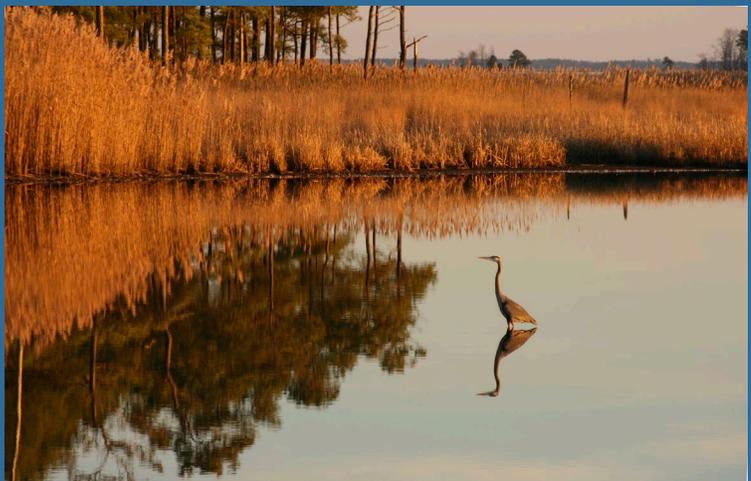
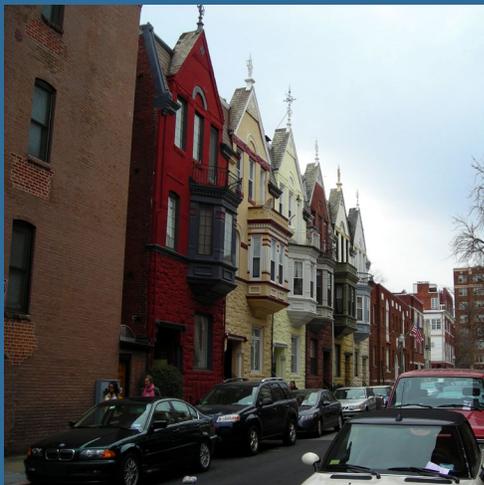


LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Supporting the region's COVID-19 recovery, transportation funding, housing, water quality, climate and energy innovation, air quality, human services, homeland security, infrastructure investment and local government input across all sectors

January 2021



Metropolitan Washington
Council of Governments

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Prepared by the COG Legislative Committee for the COG Board of Directors
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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.

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ADDITIONAL FEDERAL FUNDING TO SUPPORT LOCAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS WITH COVID-19 SHORTFALLS

Support federal funding of flexible long-term and emergency supplemental funding to support state and local governments on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. The public health and economic crisis created by this pandemic underscores the need for continuing fiscal aid which accounts for the skyrocketing costs and declining revenues for state and local governments in our region. Flexible federal funding is necessary to fill immediate budgetary gaps caused by critical revenue losses for essential utilities, highways, public transportation, specifically for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), housing, and other revenue generating public authorities. State and local governments need robust and expedient relief to continue to provide essential services to their constituents.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING, PLANNING, AND CONNECTIVITY

Support Reauthorization of the Federal Transportation Funding Bill While Fixing the Deficit in the Federal Transportation Trust Fund (TTF)

The current authorization for federal transportation spending—the FAST Act— is set to expire in 2020. The region strongly supports Congress reauthorizing this Bill with funding levels for all programs for the next six years. Since 2008 the TTF revenue has been insufficient to fund the congressionally authorized surface transportation program. These shortfalls have been closed in the current FAST Act with transfers from general fund and other short-term measures. Addressing this structural deficit and systemic imbalance of the TTF revenues has to be treated as a top priority to provide certainty of federal funding for the surface transportation program.

Support Additional, Reliable, and Recurring Federal Transportation Infrastructure Funding

The National Capital Region's transportation infrastructure serves not just the region, but also the nation's federal government and its international partners. The funding needed to maintain the National Capital Region's transit (bus and rail systems), railroad, and highway infrastructure in a state of good repair is chronically underfunded and must be enhanced. With continued aging, higher than anticipated usage, and increased frequencies of severe weather conditions, the cost to maintain transportation infrastructure in a state of good repair that provides a reliable, resilient system has increased. Providing additional recurring and reliable federal funding for the National Capital Region to maintain the multi-modal infrastructure and enhance operations has to be a priority.

Support Federal Funding for the Region's Metrorail System

The Metrorail system is the centerpiece of the metropolitan Washington region's 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 provide its share of both operating and capital funding for the Metrorail system that its employees and the region depend on. Specifically, support the reauthorization of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) beyond FY2019 to fund the federal government's annual appropriations for Metro's capital improvement budget at or greater than \$150 million a year.

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 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. 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 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 telecommuting; 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.

WATER QUALITY PROTECTION

Support Investments in Water Infrastructure

Support sustained and expanded funding for state and federal water quality programs, including the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) funding, state revolving funds (SRFs), stormwater local assistance funds, and the Chesapeake Bay Program. 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 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 Deployment of Clean Energy Innovation and Technology

Encourage and support investment in energy-sector innovation across sectors to increase energy efficiency and transition to clean energy sources. Support and protect regulatory and policy frameworks that foster continued development and expansion of clean energy solutions to preserve reductions in emissions due to the coronavirus pandemic and additional actions needed to meet the newly established 2030 regional greenhouse gas emission reduction goal. Foster continued business model innovation and encourage and expand the adoption of energy efficiency and clean, distributed energy generation technologies and infrastructure, and support for low and zero-emission vehicles and infrastructure.

Enhance Sustainable Secure Energy Access for All

Prioritize and protect funding for energy-sector infrastructure to improve affordability, resilience and reliability. Support policies and funding for energy improvements such as energy efficiency, cyber security, microgrids, district energy systems, and storage technology, especially when coupled with clean energy generation. Support community-based efforts and public-private partnerships to improve climate and energy resilience and equity at the local level.

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. Support policies and programs developed as a result of COVID that foster reduced emissions, such as expanded telework policies.

Expand Clean Energy Finance

Expand options for and improve access to clean energy finance at the state and local levels. Foster cost effective and efficient market frameworks and reasonable regulatory frameworks that support clean energy investment across all sectors and enhance investment certainty. Establish and enable key partnerships, institutions, agencies, plans, and programs to support sustainable clean energy incentives and lower the cost of doing business in the clean energy sector.

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.

Enhance Incentives and Financing Mechanisms for Green Infrastructure and Natural Resource Protection

Support legislation and funding opportunities that address urban heat island, flood control and management, water quality programs, and stormwater management in the region to preserve and enhance ecologically valuable green spaces in urban, suburban and rural areas. Support investment in nature-based, resilient green infrastructure network solutions to reduce risk from surge, riverine and overland storm, and sunny day flooding and extreme heat, enhance natural community resiliency, protect biodiversity and buffer the impacts of development. Support incentives and funding mechanisms that encourage landowners to protect their trees.

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.

HOUSING AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Support Efforts to 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 that provides a diverse range of housing units, including size and price point that is affordable for our region's residents. Encourage innovative regulatory reforms that result in the production of a greater variety of housing types and eliminate exclusionary zoning practices. Support expanding funding for renters, landlords, and moderate-income homeowners during the 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. Increasing the supply of supportive housing provides opportunities for 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 and to protect vulnerable residents from contracting COVID-19 during the pandemic. Support eviction moratoriums, coupled with financial rental assistance to tenants and landlords, to prevent a significant increase in people experiencing homelessness during a public health emergency.

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.

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, 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 and other outpatient services; 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.

Increase Food Security and Promote Healthy Food Access

Amidst growing food insecurity across the region, lack of clarity on the timing of additional, needed federal relief for vulnerable families and individuals, and uncertainty about when the Childhood Nutrition Reauthorization Act may be taken up again: support federal, state and local initiatives to increase food and cash assistance to residents in need, increase participation in programs among eligible residents, and streamline program administration. Increase funding for the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). Enhance and expand the Women Infants and Children (WIC) Program, federally funded school meal programs, and other programs that improve food access for vulnerable low-income individuals and families in the region. These actions should provide the opportunity for programs to source from regional farmers and food businesses.

Support Small and Medium-sized Farmers, Food Entrepreneurs, and Restaurants

Support strengthening programs that advance regional food systems development, on-farm conservation, connections between farmers and consumers of all income levels, especially programs that provide incentives to help low-income residents access healthy local food. Support renewed relief for restaurants and food businesses, and efforts to address long-standing food system inequities faced by Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) farmers and food business owners.

HOMELAND SECURITY AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response

Support funding for public health emergency response 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 preparedness and response activities. 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. Prioritize and consider local first responders and essential workers in the development of national distribution plans for PPE.

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.

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