

February 25, 2023

Esteemed Chairs Cohen and Lemar,  
Members of the Transportation Committee:

The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) appreciates the opportunity to comment on Proposed Bill 5989, *An Act Concerning Local Transportation Projects*.

Bill 5989 addresses two concepts: 1) regional options to improve transportation project delivery and 2) maintenance of funding parity under the Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LoTCIP). WestCOG is supportive of both concepts:

1. Public roads in Connecticut that are not state highways are owned and maintained by municipalities. Unlike other states, Connecticut has no county government and, by extension, no county roads.

As a result, every municipality in Connecticut is responsible not only for routine maintenance of its roads and associated infrastructure (e.g., bridges, signals, sidewalks) but also for less common, more specialized transportation functions associated with them. These include financing, grant management, design, right-of-way acquisition, construction, and operations. These functions may recur with sufficient frequency in larger municipalities – to support the development of specialized in-house talent and to build the institutional knowledge necessary to carry them out. However, in smaller municipalities, even modest projects can present a steep learning curve and bog down with a lack of resources and delays.

The legislature recognized the importance of – and financial challenges associated with – rehabilitating and upgrading local roads when it created the Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LoTCIP). This program has been hugely successful and provided the needed resources to municipalities to address local road deficiencies. LoTCIP gives municipalities an efficient option to advance local road and other transportation projects through their respective regional Council of Governments, in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Transportation.

Expanding the ability for COGs to assist directly in the delivery of transportation projects by extending the regional role beyond the planning phase would build on this success. Under such a model, COGs could participate in design, right-of-way, and/or construction. This option, which would remain voluntary for all participants, would enable COGs to serve as a one-stop regional transportation resource for municipalities, providing the range of services that county transportation departments in other states do. To support this evolution, WestCOG would adjust this concept as follows.

First, as funding sources and project costs can fluctuate over time, set any limitations on project delivery (such as cost) under this concept, as warranted, administratively – which can adjust more readily to changing needs and opportunities – rather than statutorily.

Second, authorize COGs as a direct recipient of LoTCIP funds for the purpose developing and implementing regional projects. This would permit COGs to work with two or more municipalities to design and implement projects that lend themselves to coordination (e.g., signal replacement in multiple communities), may not meet the minimum cost threshold for a LoTCIP project individually but collectively do when bundled, or that cross town lines. Enabling the development by and implementation of projects by COGs provides an option to improve the delivery of projects such as these.

Enabling transportation projects to be designed and delivered regionally will further the development of engineering and construction management capacity on a regional basis and may produce cost savings through the bundling and bidding out of projects regionally.

2. Since inception of LoTCIP, Connecticut has allocated funds under the program equivalent to the amount of federal STBG funds provided to state. With the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the amount of federal funds provided under the STBG program increased about 14% between federal fiscal year 2021 and 2022 (with ca. 2.3% average annual adjustments following that through FFY 2026). To ensure that LoTCIP continues to serve as a viable and equal alternative to STBG, it is critical that level of LoTCIP funding be increased to the same level as STBG funding authorized under IJJA/BIL.

WestCOG supports maintaining LoTCIP funding levels equivalent to the STBG funding over the life of IJJA and successor legislation, so that as federal STBG appropriations grow, the allocation of LoTCIP funds at the state level would rise by same amount.

These concepts build on existing, successful regional programs to further improve the delivery of transportation projects in Connecticut, and WestCOG supports their advance.

Should you have questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your consideration.



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Executive Director