

March 6, 2026

Esteemed Chairs Cohen and Berger-Girvalo,  
Members of the Transportation Committee:

The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) appreciates the opportunity to comment on Raised Bill 416, *An Act Concerning Transportation System Modernization*.

WestCOG does not have comments on the electric vehicle rebate provisions in Section 1 of the bill. However, we strongly support several other provisions that address important transportation system needs in Connecticut, particularly those related to traffic signal modernization, school bus electrification timelines, and freight rail utilization.

## I. SECTION 2 — TRAFFIC SIGNAL MODERNIZATION

WestCOG **supports** Section 2, which revises the municipal matching grant program for traffic signal modernization and directs priority toward projects located in heavily congested areas.

This prioritization is particularly important for southwestern Connecticut. Traffic congestion in the area is among the worst in the United States. The Interstate 95 corridor through Stamford has been ranked the most congested highway corridor in the nation, reflecting the intense travel demand generated by the region's proximity to the New York metropolitan area and the concentration of employment in Stamford and Norwalk.

In this environment, relatively modest operational improvements can yield significant benefits. Traffic signal modernization is one of the most cost-effective congestion mitigation strategies available. Modern signal systems allow municipalities to:

- optimize signal timing in real time
- coordinate signals across municipal boundaries
- reduce unnecessary vehicle idling
- improve corridor travel times
- support transit signal priority systems

In coordinated corridors, signal optimization alone can reduce intersection delay by 10 to 40 percent, making it one of the most effective operational tools available to transportation agencies.

Signal modernization is also critical for improving bus service reliability. The Connecticut Department of Transportation's Route 1 Bus Rapid Transit Feasibility Study identified signal timing improvements and transit signal priority as key tools for improving travel time reliability along the corridor between Stamford and Norwalk. The study itself was intended to provide a blueprint for "bringing faster, more reliable bus service to the heavily traveled Route 1 corridor between the New York State Line and New Haven."

Improvements such as transit signal priority and queue jump lanes can significantly reduce bus delays at intersections and improve transit competitiveness in heavily congested corridors.

Targeting signal modernization funding toward the state’s most congested corridors will therefore produce benefits for both general traffic and public transportation, improving mobility across the entire transportation system.

## II. SECTION 4 — SCHOOL BUS ELECTRIFICATION TIMELINES

WestCOG **supports** the revisions to the bus electrification requirements in Section 4 of the bill. Reducing emissions from school transportation is an important policy goal. However, the market for electric buses has not yet developed as quickly as anticipated when earlier statutory deadlines were adopted. Recent analysis conducted by WestCOG on alternative fuel vehicles identified several challenges affecting the electrification of heavy-duty vehicle fleets:

1. The market for electric buses remains relatively limited, with fewer manufacturers and less competition than the conventional diesel bus market. This can increase procurement costs and limit purchasing options for school districts.
2. Heavy-duty electric vehicles still face operational constraints related to range, charging time, and cold-weather performance. These factors are particularly important for school bus operations that must operate reliably on fixed daily schedules.
3. Electrifying bus fleets requires significant charging infrastructure and electrical capacity. Providing sufficient electrical service at existing bus depots may require costly upgrades to electrical infrastructure.
4. School buses typically operate for long service lives. Aggressive statutory timelines may require school districts to retire buses before the end of their useful life, resulting in the loss of significant public investment.

Adjusting timelines to reflect current technology readiness and market conditions will allow school districts to transition to cleaner vehicles in a responsible and financially sustainable manner.

## III. SECTIONS 6 AND 7 — FREIGHT RAIL AND HEAVY FREIGHT TRANSPORTATION

WestCOG **supports** the intent of Sections 6 and 7, which seek to examine opportunities to expand freight rail use in Connecticut, including the transport of municipal solid waste. Connecticut relies overwhelmingly on trucking for freight movement—approximately 97 percent of freight in the state moves by truck, placing significant pressure on the state’s highway network. As the Connecticut State Rail Plan notes, “improving and expanding rail in Connecticut can offset investment and maintenance needs of the highway system, reduce congestion, offer safe and resilient travel options, and provide flexibility for shippers and the traveling public.”

Heavy trucks have disproportionate impacts on transportation infrastructure, traffic operations, and roadway safety. Roadway wear increases exponentially with axle weight, meaning that a single fully loaded tractor-trailer can cause pavement damage equivalent to thousands of passenger vehicles. Trucks also accelerate and decelerate more slowly than passenger vehicles, require longer stopping distances, and can reduce overall traffic throughput on already constrained corridors such as Interstate 95 and U.S. Route 1. These characteristics contribute both to congestion and to safety challenges in heavily traveled corridors.

Freight rail provides a substantially more efficient transportation mode for heavy and bulky goods. As the State Rail Plan notes, “rail is a more fuel-efficient mode of transportation than truck or

automobile... freight railroads can transport one ton of freight for 470 miles per gallon.” Rail transportation can therefore reduce congestion, lower emissions, and reduce wear on Connecticut’s constrained highway network.

These advantages are particularly relevant for commodities such as waste, construction materials, and other heavy bulk goods. Many of the heaviest movements on Connecticut’s highways involve construction materials, including crushed stone, sand, fill, lumber, steel, drywall, and other building materials, and transportation costs represent a significant component of their delivered price. Improving the ability to move construction materials by rail where feasible could therefore reduce truck traffic while lowering transportation costs for building materials. Over time, improvements in freight transportation efficiency can contribute to lower construction costs and improved housing affordability, an issue of importance across Connecticut.

Because freight movement is a transportation system issue affecting highways, rail infrastructure, and regional mobility, it fits naturally within the state’s transportation planning framework. The policy question addressed by this legislation concerns how heavy freight should be transported. Shifting appropriate freight movements from highway to rail can reduce congestion, improve highway safety, lower emissions, and reduce wear on Connecticut’s transportation infrastructure.

Connecticut already has emerging examples of this approach. A rail-based waste transfer facility in Danbury is currently expanding operations to move approximately 300 tons of material per day by rail, demonstrating the practical role rail freight can play in reducing truck traffic in the state.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATION: CONSOLIDATE THE PROPOSED WORKING GROUPS**

While WestCOG supports the intent of Sections 6 and 7, we respectfully suggest that the Committee consider consolidating the two proposed working groups into a single freight rail working group. The bill establishes two separate working groups—under two different agencies. Because these groups would be examining closely related issues, maintaining two separate groups could create unnecessary duplication of effort, increase coordination challenges, and potentially result in inconsistent recommendations.

WestCOG suggests establishing a single working group with a broader focus on freight mobility, coordinated by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT). Because CTDOT already leads the state’s rail and freight planning efforts and works closely with regional planning organizations, operators, and neighboring states on freight system issues, it is positioned to coordinate a working group focused on expanding freight rail utilization.

As the regional planning organization responsible for transportation planning in southwestern Connecticut, WestCOG would welcome the opportunity to assist in this effort. Regional planning organizations work closely with the Department on planning, data analysis, and coordination with municipalities, and can provide valuable on-the-ground perspective about local conditions, infrastructure constraints, and opportunities for improved freight mobility. Other COGs across Connecticut may also be able to contribute valuable regional insight and technical expertise.

Finally, the Committee may wish to consider whether additional resources or support may be necessary to carry out this additional work effectively, ensuring that the working group can produce meaningful and actionable recommendations.

## V. CONCLUSION

WestCOG appreciates the Committee's efforts to modernize Connecticut's transportation system. We respectfully support the provisions of Raised Bill 416 that:

- prioritize traffic signal modernization in heavily congested areas
- adjust school bus electrification timelines to reflect current technology and market conditions
- explore opportunities to expand freight rail utilization in Connecticut

Taken together, these provisions represent practical, data-driven steps toward improving mobility, highway safety, infrastructure performance, environmental outcomes, freight efficiency, and economic competitiveness in Connecticut's transportation system.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of these recommendations and would welcome the opportunity to discuss them further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francis Pickering". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Francis R. Pickering  
Executive Director