



**BART RUSSELL  
TESTIMONY  
CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF SMALL TOWNS (COST)  
BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
MARCH 20, 2009**

**RE: SB-43, AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE UNITED MUNICIPAL ASSISTANCE  
GRANT PROGRAM**

**The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) supports the overall thrust of SB-43, which would continue Connecticut's commitment to \$30 million in funding for Town Aid Road Program and \$30 million for the Local Capital Improvement Program (LOCIP), give towns discretion to allocate a portion of the funds to meet other municipal obligations, and provide incentives for multi-town cooperation.**

Although we recognize that the state is facing unprecedented fiscal problems, we are concerned that the Town Aid Road (TAR) program has been under-funded for years. Currently, the TAR program is funded at \$30 million per year – not \$12.5 million, as reflected in statute. \$22 million was authorized in last year's budget in addition to \$8 million from the surplus for a total allocation of \$30 million per year.

The Town Aid Road (TAR) program provides towns with an essential source of financial support, which is critical to improving the condition and safety of the thousands of road miles for which towns are responsible. Municipalities currently own and maintain an estimated 17,115 road miles, more than four times the road miles owned and maintained by the State of Connecticut. Traffic congestion on state highways and increased use of the local road and bridge network has resulted in a greater need for improvement and repairs to local roads and bridges. Insufficient funding forces towns to defer making needed improvements and repairs to local roads. This deferred maintenance results in significantly higher repair costs.

Unfortunately, TAR funding levels suffered drastic cuts in 2002 – from \$35 million to \$12.5 million. Although the legislature allocated \$30 million to TAR for FY 08, it is still less than the \$35 million allocated in FY 02. In fact, funding for TAR has not increased substantially since the program's inception in 1967, and taking into account inflation, this translates into severe reductions in TAR funding since 1967.

Well-maintained local road networks are vital to the state's overall business climate and competitiveness. Maintaining roads and bridges is also a safety issue – roads and bridges that are allowed to fall into disrepair create potential hazards for Connecticut citizens. Connecticut has made a tremendous commitment to improving state highways and bridges. Now, it is time to take care of our local road network.

Although we appreciate efforts to provide towns with more flexibility in meeting their fiscal obligations, it is our understanding that we already have the discretion to target such funds to other areas.

We would be pleased to work with the committee to address these issues as you develop a proposed budget.