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**Testimony  
Betsy Gara  
Executive Director  
Connecticut Council of Small Towns  
Before the Finance, Revenue & Bonding Committee  
March 4, 2013**

**RE: SB-842, AN ACT AUTHORIZING AND ADJUSTING BONDS OF THE STATE FOR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS, TRANSPORTATION AND OTHER PURPOSES**

➤ **Town Aid Road Program**

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) supports the **provisions in SB-842** which double funding for the Town Aid Road program and restore funding for the Local Bridge program - programs that COST has long championed.

Supporting investment in local infrastructure is vital to Connecticut's small towns. Well-maintained roads and bridges provide small towns with a strong foundation for supporting economic development and protecting public safety.

The Town Aid Road (TAR) program has been under-funded for years. 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*. Currently, the TAR program is funded at \$30 million per year in bond funds.

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.

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### ➤ **Local Bridge Program**

We are pleased that the Governor's proposed budget includes funding to reactivate the Local Bridge program, which COST members have identified as a top priority in our 2013 Legislative Platform.

Towns and cities in Connecticut are responsible for maintaining more than 3,400 bridges and culverts. Recognizing the huge costs associated with constructing and maintaining bridges, the legislature created the Local Bridge program in 1984. However, funding for the program was eliminated in 2009 to help address the state's budget deficit. Although federal funding and other state funds are available for a limited number of projects, towns are struggling to find ways to maintain bridges. The Federal program also excludes bridges under 20 foot spans whereas the State program covered spans of 6 feet or greater.

According to an analysis prepared by the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG), over a third of Connecticut municipal bridges are considered either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. We therefore urge your support for reactivating and modernizing this once-robust program. We also ask lawmakers to help nudge the various state agencies to streamline the permitting process since it can take up to five years to gain approval to proceed, adding unnecessary costs and jeopardizing public safety.

### ➤ **Small Town Economic Assistance Program**

COST supports provisions in SB-842 which provide level funding of \$20 million per year for the Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP). Recognizing that Connecticut's suburban and rural towns – communities under 30,000 in population - play a vital role in the state's economic, social and cultural well-being, STEAP was established by the legislature in 2002 to provide small towns with assistance to support economic development and infrastructure projects. We urge continued support for this program.

### ➤ **Local Capital Improvement Program (LoCIP), Clean Water Funding**

In addition, this proposal expands the Local Capital Improvement Program (LoCIP) and continues strong investment in clean water projects – programs that are vital to our communities.

COST understands that the increases in these bond funded programs are intended to offset the elimination of other municipal aid programs, such as PILOT and the Pequot Mohegan grant. While we appreciate the efforts to keep towns whole, we are concerned about how shifting funding from unrestricted municipal aid categories to capital investment and education accounts will ultimately affect the bottom line in our small towns.

*COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process. Its members are Connecticut towns with populations of less than 30,000. COST champions the major policy needs and concerns of Connecticut's suburban and rural towns.*

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