



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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Office of the
Commissioner

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Public Hearing – March 18, 2013 Planning and Development Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Jim Redeker Department of Transportation

Raised H.B. 6629 - An Act Concerning Regionalism in Connecticut.

The Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) supports the concept of consolidating regions to create stronger more efficient organizations. ConnDOT also supports the proposal to reconstitute all regional planning organizations (RPOs) as councils of government (COG). However, we do not believe that the consolidation outlined in the bill provides the best option in order to achieve more robust and effective regions. More importantly, the Department is concerned that the eight regions proposed in the bill will make administration of the federally-mandated metropolitan planning programs more cumbersome. Since ConnDOT is responsible for the oversight of these federally-funded programs, we would recommend a reorganization proposal that is as well suited for transportation planning purposes as it is for the efficient delivery of other regional or municipal services. To serve transportation planning functions, the regional boundaries should be tied more closely to metropolitan area boundaries rather than county boundaries. We also believe that eight regions are too many for transportation purposes, and suggest that this number be reduced.

While we do not support the specific consolidation proposed in bill 6629, we welcome the discussion of this issue. It is particularly timely for ConnDOT since we are faced with implementing the new federal transportation authorization act known as MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century). The federal law affects most of the transportation programs at ConnDOT, and it also directly impacts the regional transportation planning programs.

The Department and others have long recognized that Connecticut's existing structure of 14 separate small planning regions is ill-suited for conducting effective transportation planning. Such small-scale regional planning organizations do not serve the intent of the federal programs that enable and fund the transportation planning programs in each region. Federal programs are based on the concept of a single regional agency being responsible for an entire metropolitan area. In Connecticut, most regions are undersized and encompass only a portion of a metropolitan area. Most regions are also too small to possess the necessary staff expertise to meet all the requirements of federal metropolitan planning programs.

The problems inherent in the small scale of our regions will be exacerbated as Connecticut moves forward with implementation of MAP-21. The new federal law places more responsibilities on metropolitan planning organizations. This will demand higher levels of staff expertise, more sophisticated technical analysis, and entirely new business practices that are driven by performance measurement and asset management. These heightened requirements will only aggravate the problem of undersized and understaffed regions.

MAP-21 has led the Department to begin reconsidering the question of what is the optimum size for regions, and what is the best way to create larger and stronger regional organizations. Larger regions will create more proficient and successful metropolitan planning organizations. They will also build stronger regional partners that the Department can work with to advance transportation programs and projects throughout the state. Commensurate with this improved capability, ConnDOT could assign regions a broader role with greater authority and responsibility. In summary, the Department of Transportation supports the goals of this bill, but believes more consideration must be given to how to best establish stronger and more effective regions.

For further information or questions, please contact Pam Sucato, Legislative Program Manager for the Department of Transportation, at (860) 594-3013 or pamela.sucato@ct.gov.