

River COG Testimony to the CGA Planning and Development Committee on HB 6851
March 6, 2015

Good Morning!

My name is Samuel Gold. I am the executive director of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments, otherwise known as River COG. River COG has seventeen member municipalities, including Old Saybrook, Westbrook, and Clinton along the state's Shoreline East Commuter Railroad. I am here today to comment on Governor's Bill Number 6851 AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTICUT TRANSIT CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY. I have consulted with the region's chief elected officials affected by the proposed authority and I am here today to relay their comments and concerns with the proposal.

Transit oriented development leverages significant public investment in public transportation, to create walkable and more liveable communities. This type of development is not new to Connecticut. In fact, most of our cities and towns were built around train stations, which supported the development of attractive and vibrant centers. Communities across the state can benefit from new investment in transit corridors and promoting development that is oriented to stations along these corridors. In addition to revitalization, transit oriented development can help attract young professionals back to Connecticut, reduce traffic, improve air quality (including reducing carbon emissions), promote physical activity through walking and bicycling, and redirect development away from our greenspaces. I am encouraged that the state is considering ways to facilitate this type of development.

Unfortunately, the Connecticut Transit Corridor Development Authority, as proposed in Governor's Bill 6851, has a number of shortcomings that, in our opinion, detract from its desirability and efficacy. The first issue is the lack of detail in the purpose of the authority. Besides a single mention of "transit oriented development" there is nothing more in the bill that would require coordination between Authority projects and the transit corridors that they are intended to support. In fact, there is

no discussion of transit corridor plans or how Authority efforts would align with transit investments and planning for the state's commuter rail and bus rapid transit corridors. The bill has all the mechanics necessary for bonding, but fails to present a vision of what this Authority will be creating and how those activities will be successful.

Successful redevelopment of town and city centers requires broad partnerships including all levels of government and the public and private sectors of the economy. Unfortunately, the proposed Authority is set up to pursue development projects in a top down manner. The bill gives the Authority unilateral power to bond, condemn, and develop the prime 502 acres surrounding a municipality's transit station without any municipal control or public input. Many of the regions and municipalities affected by this proposed Authority have plans and zoning regulations meant to promote and encourage redevelopment around transit stations. The Authority does not have to follow these visions, nor are they required to hold public hearings or involve the public in the development projects they pursue. Furthermore, by instructing that "all state and municipal agencies, departments, boards, commissions and councils shall cooperate with the Connecticut Transit Corridor Development Authority..." the bill is requiring municipalities to be the Authority's partner, instead of the other way around. It is my opinion that a successful Authority would be one that seeks partnership, and does not impose it.

The governance of the proposed Transit Corridor Development Authority is also troubling. Instead of being led by representatives from the regions and communities along the transit corridors, the Authority will be controlled by gubernatorial appointees and agency chiefs. As proposed, the Authority's unilateral powers could easily be directed for political purposes. Overseeing the redevelopment of 502 prime acres around 65 transit stations in 41 municipalities is too important to be a partisan charge.

Additionally, it is confusing why the bill identifies the Capital Region Development Authority as a potential host for the Connecticut Transit Corridor Development Authority. I have no issue with the Capital Region Development Authority and the great work they have done to revitalize downtown Hartford, but Connecticut's New Haven Line is the busiest commuter rail line in the country, and an obvious primary focus for a transit corridor development authority. What special knowledge or capabilities would the CRDA bring to developing transit oriented projects that are predominately outside of Hartford? Also why does the bill presuppose that the Connecticut Transit Corridor Development Authority wouldn't be a standalone entity with its own operational capability?

Finally, it is also perplexing as to why the Regional Councils of Governments that are responsible for transportation planning and federal funding are not mentioned in this bill. Transit corridors are regional in nature and should be recognized as such.

In conclusion, I once again would like to reiterate my municipalities' support for transit oriented development that leverages our train stations. We look for support from the state as we try to implement our visions of revitalized community centers, built around commuter rail. We hope that if the Connecticut Transit Corridor Development Authority is established, that its purpose is to partner with municipalities and Councils of Governments to help them realize their vision of transit oriented development and revitalization, rather than the vision of a state authority.

Thank You.