NAUGATUCK VALLEY
COUNCIL of GOVERNMENTS
49 Leavenworth Street, 3rd Floor, Waterbury, CT 06702 · 203-757-0535 · 203-735-8688 · nvcogct.org

March 4, 2016

Re: Support of Senate Bill 19, AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE TRANSIT CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AUTHORITY

Chairs Senator Osten and Representative Miller, and members of the Planning and Development Committee:

We, the undersigned, are writing today in support of SB-19, An Act Establishing the Transit Corridor Development Assistance Authority (TCDAA). As chief elected officials from municipalities along the Waterbury Branch Line, we value the impact that creation of this authority would have on local economic development throughout our region.

To detail the importance and timeliness of this bill for our communities: The Department of Transportation has already begun improvements to our rail infrastructure that will permit half-hour service during morning and evening peak periods. It has also established CTfastrak Express Service from Waterbury, and we plan to expand CTfastrak branches to the south and west of our region. However, without a strong tool to create public/private partnerships that will facilitate private investment around these transit hubs, our communities, and the State of Connecticut, will miss out on numerous opportunities to build upon and expand the impact of these public investments.

We need to work to improve rail stations and parking facilities, and to establish new commercial and residential opportunities around our transit centers. Many individual communities may not possess the corridor-level market knowledge required to make these efforts successful. Likewise, the state lacks the capital to make all of these key investments. It is crucial that we develop the ability to have private investors develop, lease, and manage this infrastructure. The TCDAA can help municipalities make use of Tax Increment Financing, another tool enabled by the General Assembly during the last session, which can help finance Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and other town redevelopment initiatives. The TCDAA is exactly the tool needed to enable our municipalities to capitalize on public investment in transit.

While all of the communities in the Waterbury Branch Line Rail Corridor have been actively involved in planning for transit oriented development, only a few have the particular staff capabilities and adequate resources to realize these complex TOD projects. This is especially important regarding the layering and leveraging of the combination of private and public investment necessary to accomplish these types of projects. The TCDAA represents the key to make these deals happen. With all due respect to the Department of Transportation, these wider development efforts require an entirely different skill set from establishing transit services and hubs. Successful surrounding developments involve complex deals and require staff with multi-disciplinary experience in financing, marketing, management and construction.

During the 2015 Legislative Session, and again this year, we have heard a number of specious concerns about the creation of this quasi-governmental authority. We can assure you that as municipal chief elected officials, we have examined this bill closely and can find no reason to oppose it.

Some municipalities, particularly those without substantial transit connections, may not see the value in the creation of this tool. However, we find several key reasons to support this bill:

- Provisions for local control of development are unchanged from our current planning and zoning regulations. Projects coordinated by the TCDAA must abide by municipal zoning, subdivision, and wetland regulations, municipal plans of conservation and development, and any municipal ordinance for development on municipal or private property.
- The central coordination of various state agencies in the conduct of individual projects is an essential yet missing piece of the puzzle needed for successful projects. This bill will rectify that.
- SB-19 requires that the municipality invite the TCDAA to participate in a project within its borders. The execution of a Memorandum of Agreement signed by the municipal CEO and approved by the local Legislative Body is required.

There are also substantial benefits that will accrue to the state as a whole by having this Authority available to assist municipalities with these developments:

- TODs generate increased ridership on local transit modes, reducing the subsidy required by the state to operate them.
- Successful developments near transit hubs lower Connecticut's cost of living: Connecticut residents who live within ½ mile of regular, dependable transit spend less than half the percentage of their household budget on transportation than people who primarily drive motor vehicles.
- All of our rail hubs on the Waterbury Branch have substantial, mature and underutilized infrastructure, a development cost that does not need to be picked up by taxpayers when Connecticut competes to attract new business development along the revitalized rail corridor.

To conclude, we the CEOs of the Waterbury Branch Rail Corridor urge you to establish this voluntary tool to complete the municipal development toolkit. It will provide expertise and knowledge as we compete with other states for business relocations and development.

On behalf of:

Christopher J. Bielik, First Selectman, Town of Beacon Falls
David S. Cassetti, Mayor, City of Ansonia
Anita Dugatto, Mayor, City of Derby
N. Warren Hess, Mayor, Borough of Naugatuck
W. Kurt Miller, First Selectman, Town of Seymour

Neil M. O'Leary, Mayor, City of Waterbury
Chair, Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments