

March 4, 2016

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

The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) would like to share its comments on the following bills.

House Bill 5485, An Act Concerning Municipal Taxation

- WestCOG is **extremely concerned** about Section 1 of this bill. The section would eliminate any statute of limitations on tax corrections. Without such a limitation, any prior tax bill—even ones 100 years old or older—would be subject to revision and new collection actions. Such a change would expose property owners to the specter of historical ‘corrections’ and could undermine security in the property tax system.
- WestCOG **supports** Section 2 of this bill, which would allow municipalities to abate taxes on property rendered unusable by a natural disaster. This section will give property owners facing loss financial breathing room by enabling cities and towns to adjust their tax bills to reflect the new, diminished value of their property after a disaster. The result of this reform will be faster rebuilding and less disruption to the state economy.

Senate Bill 19, An Act Establishing the Transit Corridor Development Assistance Authority

- WestCOG appreciates the work of the Governor and the General Assembly to incorporate the concerns voiced about last year’s TCDA into this year’s TCDA. Nevertheless, we are **not convinced** that a TCDA or TCDA is the right approach. Per our legislative priorities:

“[L]ast year’s proposal for an authority empowered to override zoning and to seize property presupposes that municipalities and property owners are the reason why TOD has not taken hold in Connecticut. In WestCOG’s view, this is leaping to conclusions. Many other factors, including market conditions, demographics, a shortage of experienced developers, financing, inadequate transit service, and state regulations and statutes, could explain a perceived lack of TOD.

Rather than propose a solution to a problem whose cause has not yet been identified, WestCOG recommends that the General Assembly commission a study to quantify the market for TOD in Connecticut and to identify what barriers there are to meeting those demands. The purpose of the study would be to inform legislation—legislation that, because it would be based in science, would have a greater likelihood of leading to successful TOD creation.”

More broadly, we are uncertain whether it is wise to create quasi-governmental agencies such as the TCDA. Shaded from the sunlight of public oversight, authorities can and, in other states, have, become dens of patronage or redoubts of hidden debt. Connecticut has created a smattering of TCDA-like entities over the last few years; the General Assembly

may wish to evaluate their governance and take action as needed to hold them accountable and transparent to the people of Connecticut.

Senate Bill 329, An Act Concerning the Political Composition of Certain Municipal Bodies

- WestCOG **supports** this bill, which would encourage volunteerism and public involvement on advisory boards by eliminating party membership requirements.

Senate Bill 332, An Act Establishing a Pilot Program for Automated Speed Enforcement Devices

- WestCOG **does not support** this bill. Traffic enforcement cameras programs have a checkered history and have been dismantled in many areas. In the last two years alone, these include Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, Texas, and Washington, among others. WestCOG urges the General Assembly to take note of these failures and instead to focus on safety initiatives that enjoy broad public support and have strong and consistent track records of success.

Should you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francis Pickering". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Francis R. Pickering
Executive Director