



## CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS

Legislative Program Review &  
Investigations Committee of the  
Connecticut General Assembly

September 25, 2007

Mr. Chairman and  
Members of the Committee:

My name is Judy Gott, and I am addressing you in my capacity as Chairman of the Connecticut Association of Regional Planning Organizations (CARPO). I am also the Executive Director of the South Central Regional Council of Governments.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My remarks are in regard to the 9/18/2007 staff briefing paper entitled Connecticut's Regional Planning Organizations.

--- First, we wish to commend the Committee and its staff for producing an accurate and well balanced research report. It can serve as a good base for the Committee's policy recommendations that will follow.

--- Let me assure you that we are receptive to additional roles and responsibilities for regional planning organizations (RPO's). As all of Connecticut's planning regions were specifically designed to promote creativity, coordination and efficiency in government, this focus is always close to our thinking. We will work positively with any new responsibilities that may be proposed to us.

--- The briefing paper documents that our organizations have small staffs relative to the legislative mandates and work loads already assigned. We ask that any expansion of responsibility for RPO's be linked with appropriate funding resources. Broad authority to serve our towns in creative ways remains necessary.

The recent increase in state budgetary support thru CT OPM is appreciated. But please realize that this is a restorative action, bringing us up to the level of CT OPM support only as it was back in 1993. Since 1977 federal transportation funds have been the financial mainstay of the RPO's, with non-transportation funding continually sparse.

CARPO has documented that it is municipal membership dues that have increased the most over these decades to meet the demand for regional planning services. A significant portion of that demand is generated by other governmental levels. This increased workload ultimately results in a "hidden" unfunded mandate upon municipalities.

Due to their funding structure, the flexibility of RPO's is not directly comparable to that found in many other governmental organizations. Each hour worked must be assigned to a specific sponsoring grant. Many outsiders are under the misimpression that all of our funding is appropriated annually and that we are free to quickly reset priorities to meet new challenges. But this is not the case.

--- We note that the briefing paper found little interest by municipalities in recent decades for changes to the boundaries of the 15 regional planning organizations. We also do not hear of much interest in such changes.

But if the Committee does recommend a reexamination of RPO boundaries, we ask that the subsequent analysis be comprehensive, offering many opportunities for input, working from the local level up.

Municipalities consider their choice of planning region to be their prerogative, not the state's. We must all remember that it is the municipal units of government which are expected to exert the most effort to "think regional."

--- A related issue is the coordination of RPO boundaries with substate districting by state agencies. The criteria for RPO boundaries singles them out as the most primary of substate districts, in that the geographic extent of an RPO must be objectively verifiable by development patterns, commuting statistics, economic and institutional relationships.

Regional planning organization boundaries make sense as a delivery mechanism for a range of state needs and services. They are known, established, functional, credible, and embraced by our municipalities. Consolidation or the creation of new districts based simply on the convenience of the state without sound reasoning makes little sense.

To best promote much needed intergovernmental coordination, we ask that your recommendations call for renewed emphasis upon state agency subdistricting efforts to follow RPO boundaries rather than cross them.

--- Your report notes that the statutes offer three models for organizing regional planning in Connecticut, and that all three models are being successfully utilized by RPO's.

On this issue we do not recommend a one size fits all approach. Since all three models work well, let the regions continue to express their individuality by retaining free choice in the matter.

In closing, CARPO and the individual regional planning organizations wish to work cooperatively with you in shaping your draft recommendations. The Committee's work is helpful to us and we look forward towards better regional planning as the result.

Thank you, I would be pleased to answer any questions, as would my colleagues.

Sincerely yours,

Judy Gott  
CARPO Chairman and  
Executive Director of SCRCOG