



Denver Regional Council of Governments

Policy Statement: Federal Legislative Issues for 2015

This paper outlines the key federal policy issues of the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) and its local government members. It identifies policy positions intended to inform the Colorado congressional delegation, Congress, federal and state executive branch officials and others as they develop and implement national policy on these issues. This policy statement guides DRCOG's federal legislative positions and actions during the coming year.

DRCOG is a membership organization of nearly 60 cities, towns and counties in the Denver metropolitan region. Under federal law, it serves as the Area Agency on Aging for eight counties to aid the 60+ population and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) coordinating transportation planning with air quality goals. Under state statutes, DRCOG is a regional planning commission, responsible for preparing a regional plan for the development of the metro area.

Regional Planning



Comprehensive Planning and Land Use. Although comprehensive planning and land use are primarily matters for local determination and regional coordination, the federal government can play a supportive role in encouraging local and regional efforts through funding, technical assistance and other incentives. The Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) Metro Vision plan represents a shared regional vision for creating sustainable, livable communities that accommodate people of all ages, incomes and abilities. Metro Vision is the policy basis for all of DRCOG's programs and serves as the framework and context in which the regional council collaborates with other organizations on issues of mutual interest. Achieving Metro Vision goals requires coordinated investment in a wide range of planning and implementation activities that transcend traditional funding categories. **DRCOG supports those efforts that implement Metro Vision and encourages federal entities to align their policies and investment decisions with Metro Vision and other regional agreements to advance common objectives.**

DRCOG supports the Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities (Partnership), which is a partnership among the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Transportation (DOT), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The DRCOG Board has incorporated the Partnership's six Livability Principles into *Metro Vision* and supported legislation in 2009 and 2011 that would have provided funds to help communities develop and implement comprehensive regional plans that incorporate economic development, transportation, and housing options, while addressing environmental concerns. A sustainable region balances economic vitality, prosperity, and social wellbeing as expressed by a high standard of living for the region's residents.

***Metro Vision* establishes several regional goals, as summarized here, and DRCOG may support or oppose legislative proposals based on consistency with these goals.**

Growth and Development Goals

- ◆ Ensure urban development occurs within an urban growth boundary/area to promote a more orderly, compact and efficient future development pattern.
- ◆ Achieve at least a 10 percent increase in overall regional density between 2000 and 2035.
- ◆ Locate 50 percent of new housing and 75 percent of new employment between 2005 and 2035 in designated urban centers throughout the region. While each urban center will be unique, all urban centers will:
 - Be active, pedestrian-, bicycle- and transit-friendly places that are more dense and mixed in use than surrounding areas;
 - Allow people of all ages, incomes and abilities to access a range of housing, employment and service;
 - Promote regional sustainability by reducing per capita vehicle miles

traveled (VMT), air and water pollution, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and water consumption; and respect and support existing neighborhoods.

- ◆ Promote development patterns and community design features to meet the needs of people of all ages, incomes and abilities. Pay particular attention to the needs of older adults, which represent the fastest-growing segment of the population.
- ◆ Maintain Boulder, Brighton, Castle Rock and Longmont as distinct and self-sufficient freestanding communities, and more clearly define and support the regional role of rural town centers.
- ◆ Minimize the extent of low-density, large-lot (semi-urban) development.
- ◆ Limit the total amount of semi-urban development in 2035 to a proportion that does not exceed the current proportion of all households in the region, estimated to be approximately 3 percent.

Transportation Goals

- ◆ Provide safe, environmentally sensitive, efficient and sustainable mobility choices for people and goods, integrated with land use, while supporting the following goals:
 - Increase the rate of construction of alternative transportation facilities;
 - Reduce the percent of trips to work by single-occupant vehicles (SOV) to 65 percent by 2035;
 - Reduce regional per capita VMT 10 percent by 2035; and
 - Reduce annual per capita GHG

emissions from the transportation sector by 60 percent by 2035.

Environmental Goals

- ◆ Establish an integrated, linked, permanent parks and open space system that is accessible to all of the region's residents.
- ◆ Protect additional parks and open space as the population grows to maintain the current amount per capita with a goal to protect a minimum of 880 total square miles of parks and open space by 2035;
- ◆ Reduce regional per capita municipal and industrial water use;
- ◆ Achieve and maintain ambient air quality standards and ensure clean water to protect human health and environmental quality; and
- ◆ Minimize exposure to excessive noise levels associated with land use and transportation services.

DRCOG further urges Congress to consider the following in support of local and regional planning:

- ◆ DRCOG supports improving the coordination of housing, community development, transportation, energy, and environmental policy in the United States; coordinating federal policies and investments to promote sustainable development; and, encouraging comprehensive regional planning for livable communities and the implementation of sustainable development.

- ◆ DRCOG supports federal policies and investments that contribute to the successful development of urban centers and transit station areas throughout metropolitan areas.
- ◆ DRCOG supports federal funding, regulatory support and other incentives to bolster local and regional efforts to increase the supply of affordable housing, including housing suitable for fixed-income older adults.
- ◆ DRCOG respects private property rights within a legal context that protects local land use authority. It is also important to emphasize that governmental actions often add value to private property. While acknowledging concerns over potential inappropriate uses of that authority, DRCOG believes the U.S. Supreme Court decisions defining constitutional restrictions on local government regulation of private property and the use of eminent domain are adequate to protect both public and private rights. When these restrictions are coupled with established precedents of the Colorado Supreme Court, protections accorded to landowners are reasonable, appropriate and balanced. DRCOG opposes further restrictions on the ability of governmental entities to regulate private property for the benefit of the public and opposes takings and eminent domain legislation that goes beyond the existing rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court and the Colorado Supreme Court as an attempt to unconstitutionally restrict local land use authority.
- ◆ Federal agencies and elected officials must respect and support local and regional plans and land use authority. This includes ensuring funding decisions and the siting of federal and other facilities are consistent with those plans, and respect local and regional land use authority. Federal agencies and elected officials also must ensure maximum local and regional participation in those decisions.
- ◆ The federal government must protect open space, including natural habitats, by fully funding the land conservation, preservation and infrastructure improvement trust fund programs and providing new incentives for land conservation.
- ◆ Federal investments in local and regional data and information programs help DRCOG deliver improved information, tools and services for local and regional planning and decision-making. DRCOG supports continued funding for these programs and legislation that requires local, regional and state governments to proactively share digital data with the public.

Older Adults



Older Americans Act Reauthorization. *DRCOG has been the designated Area Agency on Aging (AAA) for the metro area under the auspices of the federal Older Americans Act since 1973. In this capacity, DRCOG is responsible for planning and advocating for the needs of the region's older residents, as well as for providing a broad array of services and programs.*

Congress last reauthorized the Older Americans Act (OAA) in 2006. The next reauthorization is currently on the federal legislative agenda. The 2006 legislation included new programs requiring states and local governments to address challenges brought by the aging of the baby boom generation. Unfortunately, the reauthorization did not include any additional funding, other than a small increase for the National Family Caregiver Program. The reauthorization also included provisions encouraging better federal, state and local coordination of services provided to persons in both in-home and community-based settings, but did not specify how these provisions would be implemented.

Since the last reauthorization, the challenges to communities, states and the nation presented by the aging of the baby boomers are better understood, especially the need for more tailored in-home and community-based services, more focused prevention programs, and increased support for family caregivers. The coming reauthorization offers a prime

opportunity to modernize and reshape aging services in the U.S. **Accordingly, DRCOG adopts the following principles for reauthorization of the OAA.**

Elimination of Obsolete Funding Provisions in the Older Americans Act

Recently, some members of the Senate conceded the current funding formula for the OAA is outdated and unfair, a conclusion reached by the GAO three years ago. The OAA funding formula generally allocates federal funds to states based on the proportion of older adults in each state. However, the last reauthorization included a "hold harmless" provision that prevents states from falling below their FY06 funding levels. Moreover, the formula uses population numbers from the 2000 Census. Allocating funds based on 13-year-old data (when a Census was conducted in 2010) penalizes states like Colorado, which have fast-growing senior populations. This combination of obsolete data and the hold

harmless provision causes Colorado to lose more funding than any other state, during both the annual appropriations as well as in the sequestration cuts. **DRCOG opposes both the use of old data to determine the number of seniors in each state and the inclusion of the Hold Harmless Provision when allocating OAA funds.**

Encourage Meaningful Coordination with Other Systems and Programs

The Administration on Aging should adopt rules and regulations incorporating the following specific concerns:

- ◆ Require states, AAAs, Medicaid long-term care agencies, and other relevant entities to continue efforts to better coordinate regional and statewide planning of services and programs for seniors.
- ◆ Coordinate all federal programs and planning processes that serve older citizens, such as the OAA, Medicaid, SAFETEA-LU and Section 202 housing programs.
- ◆ Establish new policy and program guidelines to improve coordination and optimize all public and private benefits, services, and resources aimed at promoting elder economic security.
- ◆ Remove institutional barriers to the coordination of elderly and disabled transportation services by providing the flexibility to allow trips for elderly and non-elderly disabled persons and for meal,

medical and personal services to be served by the same provider using a combination of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. DOT funding.

- ◆ Avoid shifting the cost burden from cash-strapped programs such as Medicaid to the OAA programs, simply to bail out those programs.
- ◆ Strengthen the collaboration between the AAAs and federal, state and local governments with community-based organizations and national organizations that work with diverse older adults by providing resources, including funding research, programs and training to more effectively respond to changing demographics and target services to those most in need.

Maximize Flexibility in Use of OAA Funds

The majority of federal funding provided to state and local entities under the federal OAA is specifically earmarked to particular services. While all of the OAA-funded services, such as meals and transportation, are critically important, the AAAs, local governments and service providers are in the best position to assess the specific needs in the local areas. **Increased flexibility in the use of program funds would allow AAAs to better meet the needs of older adults.**

- ◆ Simplify rules and regulations to allow better coordination of senior services, thus enabling AAAs and service providers to

more efficiently and effectively use federal funds to address local priorities. This could include the consolidation of certain funding categories to improve administration of the affected programs. For example, the Title III C-1 congregate meal and Title 3 C-2 home-delivered meal programs could be merged.

- ◆ Create flexibility in state- and federally-specified allotments of OAA funds allowing AAAs to utilize regional priorities to determine funding distributions at the local level, consistent with the goals of the Act.
- ◆ Set required local match at 10 percent and required state match at 5 percent across all programs of the OAA. Currently, required local and state funding match percentages vary widely. For example, state/local match for the National Family Caregiver Support Program is 25 percent, while the Nutrition and Supportive Services Programs require a 15 percent state/local match. In some cases, states can completely opt out of providing a state match as with the National Family Caregiver Support Program.

Fund Aging-Related Planning for Local Communities

The 2006 reauthorization established new requirements for AAAs to broaden their planning efforts beyond service needs to include senior-friendly community planning to promote livable communities for all ages, but did not include funds for this new mandate. **To assure these requirements are met,**

Congress must appropriate funds for state, regional, and local collaboration, planning, community capacity-building and technical assistance. This should include funds for conducting analyses of the strengths and needs of seniors in a given area.

Increase Federal Funding for OAA Programs

The funding provided through the OAA has proven critical in maintaining a quality standard of living for many of the nation's older adults. For years, however, OAA funding has not kept pace with inflation or the growing population of individuals eligible for services. Yet, demand by at-risk older adults in need of supportive services has risen and will continue to rise with the growth of the aging population. This long-term gap in funding translates to greater numbers of older adults and family caregivers with unmet needs and increasing pressures on state and local agencies, service providers and families. Meanwhile, waiting lists for OAA-funded services, such as Meals on Wheels, rides to medical appointments, and in-home care, have burgeoned throughout the country.

Compounding these problems, financial pressures on other programs that provide services to seniors, such as Medicare and Medicaid, have led to reductions in the services provided by those programs, and a related increase in demands on OAA programs. At the same time, there are proposals for addressing the nation's long-



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term debt that actually would result in significant cuts in funding for these programs. Funding cuts, such as those in the Budget Control Act of 2011 under “sequestration,” would have devastating consequences on vulnerable older adults in the metro area and across Colorado.

Congress needs to fund the OAA adequately now and into the future – in preparation for the aging of the baby boomers. DRCOG specifically supports:

- ◆ A balanced approach to addressing the nation’s budget deficits and long-term debt.
- ◆ Any approach must protect those older adults in greatest social and economic need by fairly balancing increased revenues and targeted spending reductions and taking no actions that increase economic vulnerability or poverty.
- ◆ Significant annual increases in the overall funding for the OAA Programs, which are necessary to catch up with the lag in historical funding. For FY 2015, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging has determined an increase in funding of at least 6.38 percent is necessary to restore 2012 funding levels to keep pace with population growth, and price increases and funding cuts since then.
- ◆ Future authorized appropriations at levels adequate to fund identified needs but at

least commensurate with the rates of growth in inflation and the economically needy older population.

- ◆ Priority for funding given to those OAA programs and services, especially nutrition services that emphasize assisting clients to live in their homes as long and as independently as possible.
- ◆ Increases in the funding for family caregiver support services (including training, respite care, counseling, and information and assistance) and the continued distribution of these monies through AAAs, which are important to address the growing needs of families who provide extensive care to their loved ones.
- ◆ Increases in funding for Long-Term Care Ombudsman programs, which are necessary to improve the ability to respond to complaints and safeguard residents’ rights.
- ◆ Congress also should change budget rules to allow credit for discretionary programs that save money in mandatory programs.

Long-Term Care Facility Quality of Care

Older adults living in long-term care communities (i.e., nursing homes and assisted living) are some of the most vulnerable

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members of society. As the Long-Term Care Ombudsman for the region, DRCOG is an advocate for the rights of residents in long-term care communities and for improvement in the quality of care in such facilities. The quality of care provided by long-term care facilities is an ongoing concern to facility residents, their families, local governments and resident advocates. **DRCOG supports increases in consumer protections for older adults and their caregivers and, in particular, strengthening the role of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman as a resident/consumer advocate and reimbursement for long-term care communities structured to enhance the quality of care for residents. DRCOG believes the following issues require particular attention by Congress and federal agencies.**

- ◆ Federal regulations designed to ensure the quality of care in long-term care facilities are not fully enforced, largely due to inadequate staffing levels in state enforcement agencies. There also are several actions that could be added to the regulations to improve enforcement. These include increased inspections and penalties on long-term care facilities failing to comply with regulations. **DRCOG supports such improved enforcement of long-term care**

regulations and an increase in funding for enforcement actions.

- ◆ Most complaints investigated by DRCOG ombudsmen are traceable to staffing issues in the long-term care facilities. The inability to maintain adequate staffing is a critical concern that negatively impacts long-term care facility quality of service. **DRCOG supports federal legislation, policies and programs to improve the quality of service in long-term care facilities, including setting minimum staffing levels and providing financial and technical assistance for the recruitment, training and retention of long-term care facility employees.**
- ◆ “Nursing home transparency” legislation currently is under consideration in Congress. The nursing home transparency provisions will enhance families’ access to information about the quality of care in nursing homes and will improve the government’s ability to ensure quality care and a better-trained staff in those facilities. **DRCOG supports legislation that includes stronger disclosure of ownership and control of facilities, better oversight of quality of care indicators, improved consumer information, and an enhanced complaint and penalty process.**

Fund the Elder Justice Act

This legislation provides critical protection for residents living in nursing homes and assisted living; provides needed resources and coordination to address the problem of elder abuse; and includes increased funding for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program. The Elder Justice Act sets out a comprehensive approach to preventing and combating elder abuse, neglect, exploitation and self-neglect.

DRCOG supports funding and implementation of the Elder Justice Act, consistent with the following principles:

- ◆ Provide a stronger and more coordinated federal response to promote elder justice.
- ◆ Increase federal support to states and communities for elder justice activities.
- ◆ Provide funding and training support to adult protection programs.
- ◆ Improve consumer protection by requiring the reporting of crimes by nursing facilities or employees and communication of consumer rights information.
- ◆ Provide new funding to improve ombudsman capacity and training, and for training of health department surveyors investigating allegations of abuse.

Other Health and Community Services.

There are numerous other health and home care issues not covered under the OAA. In general, the following policies address concerns regarding consumer protection, access to treatment, and access to services that increase

independence. **DRCOG believes it is appropriate for federal legislation, regulations and policies to promote access to health care coverage and the integration of long-term care into a continuum of medical and non-medical services, including health promotion and disease prevention.**

- ◆ **Enhancing Health and Security of Older Adults.** The Affordable Care Act (ACA) contains several provisions regarding older adults and their ability to stay healthy and age in the community. These include provisions for Aging and Disability Resource Centers, prevention and wellness programs, care transitions and coordination, and efforts to rebalance the long-term care system relative to institutional and community care. The AAAs are positioned to play a key role in implementing these provisions. **DRCOG urges Congress and federal agencies to recognize the full potential of the Aging Network and utilize AAAs in implementing these ACA provisions.**
- ◆ **Avoid Institutional Care.** Home- and community-based services are critical components in the continuum of care for the elderly and disabled and are more cost-efficient than services in institutions, particularly with regard to rural areas and for minority populations. Adequate reimbursements to providers are necessary to offset the costs of providing these important services. **DRCOG supports**

increased funding of home- and community-based care programs and higher Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements.

- ◆ **Prescription Medication.** Older adults typically require more medication than younger people. Even with the adoption of a prescription drug benefit under Medicare, the high cost of prescription medication will continue to be a financial hardship for many older adults. DRCOG supports revisions to the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit to simplify the application process and coverage offered, as well as address the gaps in coverage to provide a more comprehensive prescription medication benefit for all beneficiaries. **DRCOG also encourages the federal government to provide additional funding for AAAs to provide public education, counseling and enrollment assistance for citizens about the Medicare drug program.**
- ◆ **Patients' Rights.** Enforceable federal protections, in areas including access to care, quality assurance, patient information, grievances and appeals, doctor-patient relationship, and physician treatment decisions, are necessary to ensure that quality health care and other services are available to all. **DRCOG supports legislation to protect consumers in managed care plans and other health coverage.**

- ◆ **Housing.** The ability to afford to live in a residence independently is a concern of older adults, especially those on fixed incomes. As the Denver metro area has grown and developed, the shortage of affordable housing has become an even more important concern. **DRCOG supports policies and programs designed to support older adults, especially those of low and moderate income, and persons with disabilities to live independently in the residence of their choice. This includes policies and programs to:**

- Encourage the delivery of home- and community-based supportive services to assist older people and persons with disabilities in maintaining independence and actively engaging in their community.
- Improve home design to promote independence and aging in place, including home modification and repair, appropriate design features in new and rehabilitated housing (through principles such as universal design, visitability, inclusive home design, and energy efficiency), and the use of innovative home products.
- Promote affordable housing options by:
 - ensuring that policies, programs and other actions that affect land-use and housing support the private and public sectors in providing a variety of

housing sizes and types, while ensuring older adults and persons with disabilities have choice in the type of housing arrangement that fits their needs best. Renters and homeowners (including manufactured homeowners) should have appropriate protections. Policies should emphasize the rights of residents and minimize disparities in treatment under the law.

- promoting policies and programs that support the creation and maintenance of an adequate supply of affordable rental and ownership options integrated with the community to meet the needs of people of all ages, incomes, and abilities. This should include strengthening housing programs to ensure that policies and funding for housing assistance and preservation programs continue to

support residents who choose to remain in their homes as they age and that low- and moderate-income households have access to well-designed, safe, decent, affordable, and accessible housing integrated throughout well-designed communities.

- reauthorizing or creating programs and policies that increase the capacity for public-private partnerships to increase the range of housing choices available to older people and persons with disabilities.
- promoting financial security of housing assets to support the availability of affordable homeownership options, safeguard home equity, and promote the innovative use of housing assets to maintain and improve the independence and quality of life of older people.

Transportation



Reauthorization of MAP-21. In 2009, when Congress began work on reauthorization of SAFETEA-LU, the DRCOG Board adopted a policy statement recommending Congress create a new policy framework in the reauthorization. However, MAP-21 only meaningfully addressed the first element of that framework: invest in rebuilding the nation's transportation infrastructure. The Board stated transportation is an essential component of multidimensional efforts to advance economic development, industry growth and competitiveness; reduce the nation's carbon footprint; increase job access and mobility; and create communities having a high quality of life for people of all ages, incomes and abilities. This remains DRCOG's vision for federal-metro partnerships for prosperity. Since MAP-21 was only a two-year bill, it is critical that Congress act on its reauthorization to maintain funding stability and delivery of long-term capital projects. **DRCOG supports an energy-efficient, environmentally sustainable, multimodal transportation system that ensures America's economic competitiveness and provides livable communities for its residents. DRCOG supports providing additional transportation revenues to accomplish this vision. DRCOG urges Congress to adopt the remaining elements of the Board's previously adopted policy framework as outlined below.**

◆ **Additional Investment in the Nation's Infrastructure.** Beyond the rulemaking for the initial investments MAP-21 made in rebuilding the nation's infrastructure, **Congress, in reauthorization, should consider:**

- Including incentives to use state-of-the-practice green materials and green maintenance and construction techniques,
- Continuing MAP-21's increased emphasis on reducing the severity of accidents rather than just the total number of incidents, include performance objectives for safety in all modes, and
- Updating the system to serve our nation's aging population.

◆ **Support Multimodal Solutions.** Addressing the nation's transportation

challenges requires investment in a comprehensive, multifaceted approach. The nation will need to provide multimodal alternatives to achieve congestion relief, better air quality, reduced household transportation costs, and increased independence for people unable to drive because of age, income or ability. In the DRCOG region, the *Metro Vision* plan includes goals for increasing the rate of construction of alternative modes, reducing VMT, and reducing SOV mode share.

DRCOG supports adding multimodal transportation capacity appropriate to meet national and regional objectives.

- Programs that allow states and planning regions to develop, fund and implement integrated investment solutions should be maintained and financially enhanced. In addition, transportation funding must

allow flexibility to address the multimodal, energy and environmental needs of individual urban areas.

- Beyond MAP-21's identification of "traffic congestion," national performance objectives and measures for increasing access and mobility for people of all ages, incomes and abilities are needed, as well as flexibility to allow each state and region to decide how to best make investments to show progress toward national mobility and accessibility goals.
- Equalize federal funding match requirements across all modes of transportation.
- Create a national strategy for interregional person mobility.
- Expand MAP-21's National Freight Strategic Plan to include all major modes of freight transport including rail, water, and air, to better enable informed decision-making about efficient, long-distance freight movement.

♦ **Support Metropolitan America.**

Metropolitan areas account for 84 percent of the U.S. population and more than 85 percent of employment, income and production of goods and services. (Source: U.S. Conference of Mayors, July 2012) Growing congestion, poor system reliability, along with deteriorating infrastructure, threaten the ability of these regions, and the nation, to compete globally. Metropolitan regions must play a stronger role in the nation's transportation programs, both in the authority to direct investment and demonstrate accountability for the system's

performance. **One proposal to achieve this supported by DRCOG is the creation of a new Metropolitan Mobility and Accessibility Program.** This program would be highly flexible and would be aimed at improving metropolitan travel times and freight mobility, reducing carbon emissions and achieving national and regional energy conservation goals. MPOs would have project selection authority for this program.

A new Metropolitan Mobility and Accessibility Program would be:

- Focused on the largest metropolitan regions, and would be in addition to traditional federal aid highway and transit allocations.
- Allocated by formula to all large metropolitan regions, but receipt subject to state and local designation as a Metropolitan Mobility Authority. Unused allocations would be reallocated to areas that meet the designation requirements.
- Performance-based, require performance standards, measurements, and reporting to reduce travel time, improve freight mobility, improve safety, reduce carbon emissions, and conserve energy.
- Funded from new federal revenues (preferably, the Surface Transportation Trust Fund discussed below), and add incentives for increased local funds to include eliminating toll restrictions in metropolitan areas.

DRCOG supports transportation legislation that addresses metropolitan mobility and accessibility issues, specifically with consideration for the following:

- Enable major metropolitan areas to establish and implement overarching plans for intraregional mobility and accessibility with focus on:
 - Easy access, choices and seamless transfers
 - Elimination of traffic chokepoints and reduction of severe traffic congestion
 - Strategies that manage transportation demand and provide transit service and implement non-motorized methods of travel
 - Strategies for accommodating interregional movement of people and goods within and through the metropolitan area
 - Fostering livable communities for people of all ages, incomes and abilities
 - Promoting the urban infrastructure necessary to support high-density development around transit
 - Performance metrics that extend beyond MAP-21's traffic congestion and motor vehicle emissions measures and consider VMT reduction, economic development, environmental sustainability, global competitiveness, accessibility, etc.
- Fold "Complete Streets" policies into the metropolitan planning process so that transportation agencies routinely



consider designing and operating the entire right of way to enable safe access for drivers, transit users and vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists, as well as for older people, children, and people with disabilities.

♦ **Improve Energy Efficiency and Environmental Sustainability.**

Transportation plays a key role in achieving energy independence and addressing some of the nation's environmental concerns. More than 60 percent of every barrel of oil used in the United States today is used by the transportation sector, and transportation sources accounted for 27 percent of total U.S. GHG emissions in 2010 (Source: U.S. EPA website). The competitiveness of our economy, the health of our citizens and the strength of our national security depend on reducing our reliance on and consumption of fossil fuels. **DRCOG supports strategies to reduce fossil fuel use and GHG emissions by the transportation sector.**

- Expand investment in research and development for alternative fuels, new clean fuel technologies, more efficient vehicles, and new ideas and technologies for transporting people and goods.
- Incentivize rapid conversion to more fuel-efficient and lower-emission vehicles or retrofits.



- Increase incentives for environmentally-friendly replacement transportation fuels.
- Incentivize regions to more closely link land use and transportation infrastructure to reduce transportation energy consumption, increase non-vehicle transportation options, and reduce VMT, through techniques including scenario planning and investments in projects that improve accessibility.
- Add public transit projects that enhance capacity, convenience and/or reliability to the exempt project list for Clean Air Act purposes; these types of improvements increase in importance in situations where conformity cannot be attained.

- ◆ **Provide Responsible and Efficient Investment.** The SAFETEA-LU-authorized National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, which released a congressionally mandated report in January of 2008, called for interim investments of at least \$225 billion annually over the next 50 years at all levels of government. The February 2009 report of the National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing Commission set up under SAFETEA-LU estimated we need to invest at least \$200 billion per year at all levels of government to maintain and improve our highways and transit systems. MAP-21 did not meaningfully increase transportation revenues nor provide anywhere near these levels of investment.

DRCOG continues to support the funding principles adopted by the National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing Commission, which includes developing a funding and financing framework that:

- Supports a goal of enhancing mobility and accessibility for users of the transportation system,
- Generates sufficient resources to meet national investment needs on a sustainable basis with the aim of closing the funding gap,
- Causes users and all **(Note: This is a change from the Commission's original language, which refers to "direct beneficiaries.")* beneficiaries to bear the full cost of using the transportation system to the greatest extent possible,
- Encourages efficient investment in the transportation system,
- Incorporates equity considerations, including but not limited to geography, equity across income groups, population growth, and revenue generation, and
- Synchronizes with other broad public policy objectives (and may include energy independence, environmental protection, and workforce housing).

- ◆ **DRCOG supports both short- and long-term federal funding policies:**

- Short-term
 - Boost the federal gas tax (at minimum, to restore the purchasing power of

- the Highway Trust Fund) and other existing Highway Trust Fund revenue,
- Index the federal gas tax to inflation,
- Create a National Strategic Freight Trust Fund (supported by a dedicated funding mechanism from all users of the freight system that is predictable, dedicated and sustainable),
- Reduce federal obstacles to options available to states and localities such as tolling, congestion pricing and public/private partnerships, and
- Further expand current federal credit programs.
- Long-term
 - Carbon tax or trading programs (if Congress implements such a program) should ensure transportation activities that reduce GHG emissions receive a proportionate share of any new revenue generated by such programs.
 - Transition to a new, more direct user charge system such as the Vehicle Miles Traveled fee (also referred to as the mileage-based user fee). This includes:
 - o An aggressive research, development and demonstration program to address issues such as privacy rights, program administration, costs, revenues, partnerships with states and localities, and interplay with national policy objectives such as reducing VMT and congestion,
 - o A national public education program, and
 - o A national pilot program.
- ♦ **DRCOG supports funding, project delivery and planning policies that promote efficiency, stability and reliability:**
 - Maintain transportation program's use of contract authority, allowing states to advance money for multiyear construction projects.
 - While supporting a shift to national performance standards and goals, consideration must be given to equity issues (geographical/return on dollar).
 - Reform any earmarking processes and discretionary programs remaining or reappearing to reduce the number of earmarks and ensure transparency, simplicity and accountability; any funds so awarded should honor the full request (no "partial grants") and earmarks should not reduce transportation program formula funds.
 - Provide full-year appropriations at the start of the federal fiscal year to the level of the authorization. Limit the use of short-term continuing resolutions and rescissions. These tactics reduce the flow of or cut into formula funds and negatively impact fiscal constraint, responsible planning, implementation of federal requirements, and project continuity.
 - While MAP-21 made progress in this

regard, continue to streamline project delivery and National Environmental Policy Act processes without compromising environmental or public participation values.

- Enhance and strengthen the cooperative, collaborative partnerships required under current legislation with all the transportation planning partners.
- Support publication and dissemination of performance measurement results and analyses and widespread distribution of, and education about, the conditions of the transportation system.

Other Transportation Issues. There are numerous other transportation issues not specifically covered under DRCOG's Map-21 reauthorization policies. **Beyond the key elements of DRCOG's framework for MAP-21 reauthorization outlined above, DRCOG expresses the following policies on other federal transportation issues:**

- ♦ **Clarify and Enhance the Role of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).** The metropolitan planning process establishes a cooperative, continuous, and comprehensive framework for making transportation investment decisions in metropolitan areas. In many cases, MPOs provide the only regional, multimodal transportation plans that link transportation to land use, growth and air quality. Through the MPO process, local governments, in cooperation and collaboration with the state and local transit operators, determine the best mix of transportation investments

needed to meet long-term transportation needs of a metropolitan area. This important role must be strengthened to make metropolitan transportation planning successful.

- MAP-21 requires adequate financial forecasts through the cooperation and collaboration of the state, MPO and public transit agency to develop transportation plans. However, "collaboration, cooperation, and consultation" are poorly defined in the context of developing such financial forecasts, giving states wide discretion in how and when those estimates of revenues are to be provided and allowing for various interpretations of the regulations. DRCOG supports:
 - Expanding regulations to require all three entities to agree upon procedures governing the projection of future revenue estimates.
 - Requiring all three agencies (DRCOG, Regional Transportation District (RTD), and Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) to agree upon distribution of estimated revenues.
 - Establishing an external appeals process to USDOT if there is disagreement among the parties regarding estimate procedures and revenues.
- MAP-21 similarly requires cooperative project selection and prioritization for the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). DRCOG supports:
 - Expanding current regulations to require all three entities to agree upon

DRCOG urges Congress and the administration to Continue the federal investment for transit and multimodal projects in the Denver region



procedures governing project selection and prioritization for transportation planning and there should be consequences for not following these procedures.

- As part of the normal Memorandum of Agreement between an MPO, state DOT and local transit agency, requiring the three entities to cooperatively establish a process for addressing project cost overruns.
- Requiring suballocation to Transportation Management Areas (MPOs representing populations greater than 200,000) to be based on the total population within the MPO boundary. Currently, the suballocation formula for Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds and Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funds is based solely on the U.S. Census definition of “urbanized area” population discounting any population falling outside the urbanized area but still within the MPO-adopted boundary.
- Establishing a population-based/air quality severity formula for suballocating CMAQ funds within a state and requiring suballocation of CMAQ to non-attainment MPOs representing populations greater than 200,000 on the basis of the total populations within the MPO boundary.

- ♦ **Transit.** Transit is an essential part of the metropolitan transportation system. Implementation of the Denver region’s transit system is a high priority for DRCOG, although cost increases and revenue decreases have forced RTD and DRCOG to remove some corridors from the fiscally constrained 2035 Regional Transportation Plan. DRCOG also recognizes the importance of making transit-supportive improvements to these corridors along with the transit improvements. With the metro area having made a significant commitment of local resources for the regional transit system, **DRCOG urges Congress and the administration to take the following actions in support of transit in the Denver region:**

- Continue the federal investment for transit and multimodal projects in the Denver region.
- Provide dedicated sources of revenue and increased funding for bus rapid transit and rail new starts programs.
- Provide federal funding for the FasTracks corridors (over time this could include corridors that have had to be removed from the fiscally constrained RTP).
- Clarify with regard to transit-oriented developments (TOD) that up to a half-mile from an existing or proposed transit station, parking and transportation infrastructure, TOD planning, land acquisition, and a project or program

that supports compact, mixed-use, mixed-income, bicycle/pedestrian friendly development are eligible for federal transportation funding and require that this clarification be incorporated in funding program decisions, and work to identify additional sources of funding.

- Incorporate the Partnership for Sustainable Communities' Livability Principles into federal policy and investment decisions.
- Improve transportation services for older adults and individuals with disabilities by giving states added flexibility in utilizing their federal funds; enhancing the planning and coordination process; providing technical assistance; and promoting innovative community programs.
- Designate the "Rocky Mountain Corridor" (from Cheyenne, Wyoming, through Colorado to Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the I-70 corridor from DIA to the Utah border) and the Western Regional Alliance high-speed rail network (to provide high-speed rail connections between Denver, Salt Lake City, Reno, Las Vegas, and Phoenix) as High-Speed Rail Corridors. This action would identify them as having potential for high-speed rail activity and enable these corridors to receive federal funds that might become available for corridor studies of high-

speed rail options, development of plans for high-speed rail infrastructure, construction of high-speed rail facilities and highway/rail grade crossing safety improvements.

- ♦ **Air Quality Conformity.** The air quality conformity process is a success in the Denver region. It has increased support for multimodal planning and for integrated land use and transportation planning. It has also increased interagency coordination between the air quality and transportation planning agencies. **DRCOG supports maximum flexibility so that comparatively minor changes to the planned or programmed highway and transit network do not require a full conformity analysis at taxpayer expense. DRCOG supports continued funding for transportation projects that improve air quality.**
- ♦ **Transportation Demand Management (TDM).** DRCOG views TDM principles and practices as increasingly important elements of the region's long-range transportation planning strategy. DRCOG supports actions that minimize the barriers to the use of alternatives to the SOV and encourage changes to normal work patterns to avoid peak traffic conditions. **DRCOG also supports efforts to provide incentives to employers, schools, rideshare agencies, and individuals to encourage alternative transportation use.**

Environment



Water Conservation. *Water is a particularly scarce resource in the Denver region and western United States, and a key consideration in planning for future growth and development. Recognizing this fact, the DRCOG Board of Directors added a new water conservation element to Metro Vision, the Denver region's long-range plan for growth. The element calls on the region to maximize the wise use of limited water resources through efficient land development and other strategies, and establishes a goal of reducing regional per capita water consumption. **DRCOG therefore supports federal policies and investments that contribute to local and regional water conservation efforts.***

Water Quality. Local governments in the Denver region face increasingly complex water quality challenges in an environment unique to the arid West but without the resources to respond to them appropriately. Reauthorization of the Clean Water Act could provide local governments and regional water quality planning agencies the additional planning, financing and regulatory tools needed to address our growing water quality challenges. **As the legislative process proceeds in these areas, there are a number of issues of concern to DRCOG that Congress can address.**

- ◆ **Integrated Planning.** DRCOG supports an integrated approach to water quality, tying together the management of point sources, nonpoint sources and stormwater through the involvement of the various stakeholders.
- ◆ **Regional Planning.** The Clean Water Act recognizes the importance of planning to address the challenges associated with both point and nonpoint source pollution. The regional planning provided for in the act is even more critical, given the growing emphasis on watershed approaches. **Congress should maintain and strengthen the regional planning process as the key component of the watershed approach. The planning funds provided under section 604(b) need to be increased to assist responsible parties in meeting the**

expanding responsibilities that accompany implementation of a watershed planning and management approach.

- ◆ **Infrastructure Funding.** Colorado and the nation are at a critical juncture regarding water and wastewater infrastructure. There are significant needs for new treatment plants and upgrades to existing plants. Local governments already shoulder a significant portion of water and wastewater capital investment. **Increased funding for infrastructure investment as well as the provision of greater flexibility of these funds will allow states and local governments to determine the best use, according to local prioritization of needs.**
- ◆ **Good Samaritan Protection.** Abandoned and inactive mines present a serious risk to the quality of nearby water supplies. Lack of adequate funding for reclamation and the potential liability for "Good Samaritans" are serious obstacles that have prevented cleanup of many of these sites. DRCOG supports federal funding for reclamation activities. **DRCOG also supports legislation encouraging federal, state, tribal and local governments, as well as mining companies and nonprofit groups that have no prior ownership or responsibility for an abandoned mine, to clean up an abandoned or inactive mining site by granting them liability protections**

under several environmental statutes, including the Clean Water Act.

Superfund. DRCOG is concerned that a number of Superfund issues have become serious problems in recent years while the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) has been awaiting reauthorization. **DRCOG urges Congress to address the following issues individually or as part of a comprehensive reauthorization.**

- ♦ **Liability Protection.** Under current law and regulation, parties interested in cleaning up a Superfund site may decide not to pursue remediation efforts for fear of being held liable for preexisting problems. Lengthy clean up delays have occurred in our region and elsewhere while parties litigate over responsibility. DRCOG supports federal funding for cleanup activities. **DRCOG supports legislation and regulations encouraging parties that have had no prior ownership or responsibility for a site to clean up the site by granting them liability protections under several environmental statutes, including the Superfund law. DRCOG also supports limiting liability when a party has complied with applicable environmental laws at the time of disposal to further the goal of timely and cost-effective clean-up of Superfund sites.**
- ♦ **Community Participation.** Local governments often face significant community and neighborhood concerns regarding contaminated sites. Public involvement in the assessment, planning and clean-up for such sites is an important aspect of efforts to bring these sites to a safe condition. **Provisions that assist local governments in establishing and funding formal mechanisms for citizens to participate in the clean-up and land-use decision-making process are appropriate and necessary.**
- ♦ **Funding for Clean-up.** DRCOG is concerned that the federal government not reduce its commitment to assist with clean

up and redevelopment of these sites.

DRCOG supports the creation of new mechanisms to fund clean up to the extent they are sufficient to make significant progress toward the Act's goals. Allocation of clean-up costs among responsible parties should be according to the proportion of contamination caused by each.

- ♦ **Health Risk Criteria.** The safety and health of populations exposed to pollution associated with Superfund sites is a primary concern related to potential redevelopment. Health risk-based criteria are necessary to guide these efforts. **These criteria must reflect the intended reuse of a site and the risks to special populations, including children, the elderly and those already disproportionately exposed to pollution. Risk-based standards specific to Superfund clean up are needed to promote redevelopment of contaminated sites while protecting human health and the environment.**

Brownfields. Redevelopment of brownfields is important for economic development, and environmental and public health and safety in many areas within the Denver region. This is a specific issue related to CERCLA that is of particular significance and should be pursued separately, if inaction on the Superfund reauthorization continues. There are approximately 250 brownfields, former industrial and commercial sites, in both urban and rural areas throughout the Denver region. The redevelopment of brownfields is consistent with DRCOG's *Metro Vision*, which supports infill and redevelopment within the region. **DRCOG supports federal actions, including increased funding, to encourage the redevelopment of brownfields. DRCOG urges Congress to prioritize funding for projects that go beyond remediation and redevelopment of individual sites to focus on broader planning and economic development efforts, such as projects that incorporate brownfield remediation and redevelopment into larger infill development efforts.**

Intergovernmental Relations



Intergovernmental Cooperation. *All levels of government – federal, state, local and regional – play an important role in providing critical services and implementing programs for the benefit of their residents. Legislative bodies and executive agencies at the federal and state levels should respect the roles and responsibilities of local governments and regional entities. **DRCOG supports cooperation among federal, state, local and regional entities in developing and implementing new programs and improved approaches to service provision.***

Federal/Regional Relations. The region is the nexus of local, state and federal issues and economic activities. DRCOG convenes parties of interest on intergovernmental issues, providing the necessary forum for their resolution, and facilitating a negotiated outcome. **DRCOG urges Congress, when new legislation is proposed and existing legislation is reauthorized, to identify and use regional agencies as critical partners in the implementation of such legislation, including the planning for and delivery of services.**

Regional Service Delivery. The federal government plays an important role in setting standards and priorities for the funding of public services and programs administered at the state, regional and local levels. **When making such funding and programmatic decisions, it is essential to consider the most appropriate level of government for delivery of such public services.**

State administration of federal programs can be problematic for local governments, as state agencies tend to be more removed from clients and less responsive to their needs. On the other hand, individual local governments may lack the resources to achieve the desired efficiencies

and cost-effectiveness. Further, some programs, such as transportation, air quality and water quality, that address issues crossing local political boundaries, are most appropriately and effectively addressed at the regional level. Regional programs also often benefit from economies of scale. The collaborative partnerships of regional approaches can provide more cost-effective services and programs for users and clients. **DRCOG urges Congress to use existing regional service delivery systems.**

Principles for Implementation. New programs or changes to existing programs must at least maintain the existing level of services and provide adequate administrative funds for implementation. Otherwise, there is a shift in responsibility without adequate funds for the services to be provided or programs administered. As such, it is important to treat the continuity of service delivery as a key principle guiding any actions to create new programs or revise existing programs. **A consultative process among the federal, state, local, and regional agencies must be in place before any changes are made to services currently being delivered at local or regional levels.**

Policy Statement on Federal Legislative Issues for 2015

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