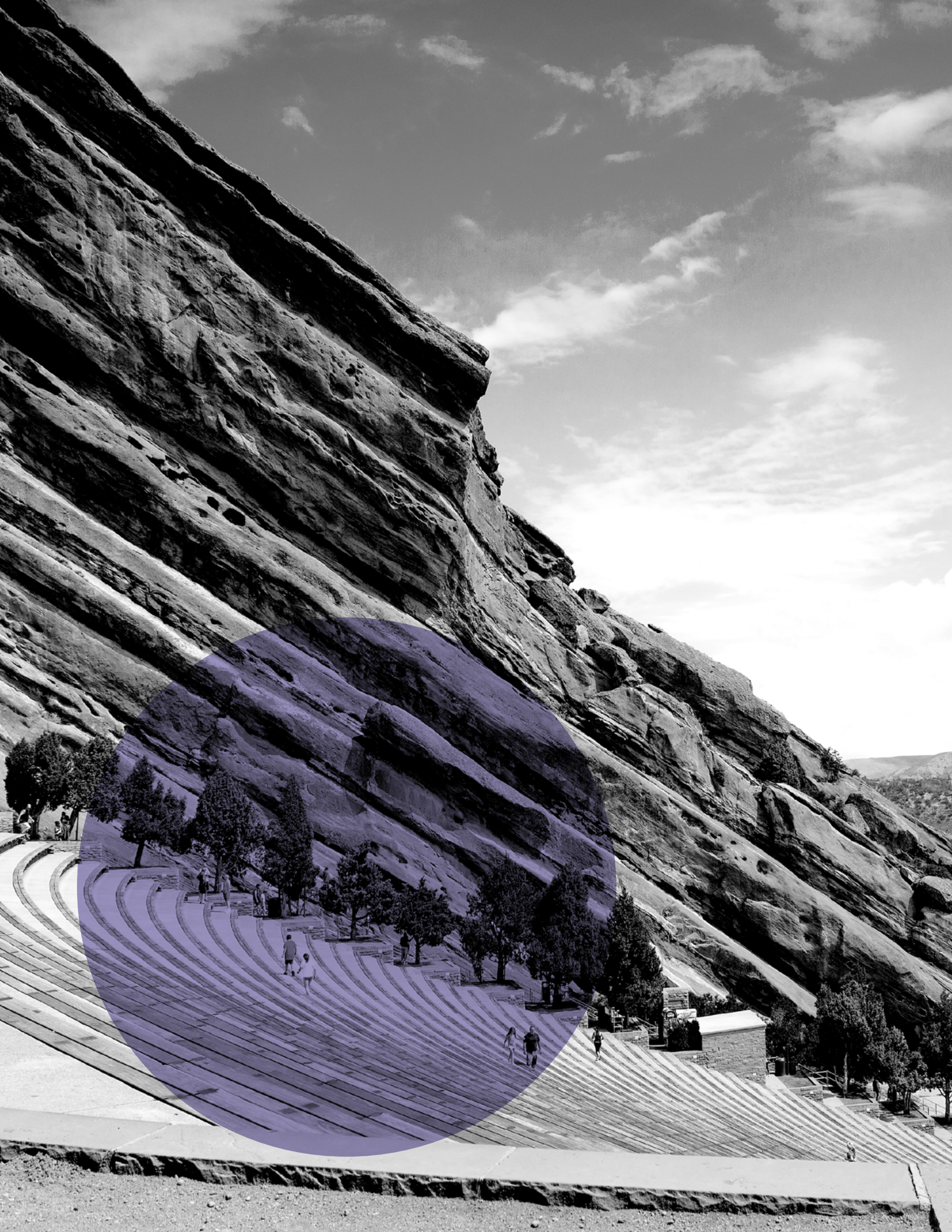




2023

**POLICY STATEMENT
ON FEDERAL
LEGISLATIVE ISSUES**



INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines the key federal policy issues of the Denver Regional Council of Governments.

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 local elected officials representing 48 municipalities and nine counties in the Denver metro area. Under federal law, DRCOG serves as the Area Agency on Aging for eight counties to aid the 60-and-older population and the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) to coordinate transportation planning with air quality goals. Under state statutes DRCOG, as the regional planning commission, prepares and adopts a regional plan for the metro area and has regional responsibility for oversight of transit projects and certain state-sponsored and private toll-road projects.

As the designated council of governments, regional planning commission, area agency on aging, and metropolitan planning organization for the Denver region, DRCOG recognizes the important role it plays in building and maintaining an equitable region where all residents and communities can thrive. DRCOG acknowledges its role in ensuring our region remains a diverse network of vibrant, connected, lifelong communities.



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. DRCOG's Metro Vision plan represents a shared regional vision for creating sustainable, livable communities that allow people of all ages, incomes and abilities to succeed. Metro Vision further recognizes that the success of the region's visionary plan requires the coordinated efforts of local, state and federal governments; the business community; and other planning partners, including philanthropic and not-for-profit organizations.

Metro Vision guides DRCOG's work and establishes shared expectations with our region's many and various planning partners. The plan outlines broad outcomes, objectives and initiatives established by the DRCOG Board to make life better for the region's residents. 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 help the region achieve the shared outcomes described in Metro Vision and encourages federal entities to align their policies and investment decisions to advance regionally determined objectives where appropriate.**



DRCOG's Metro Vision plan emerged from a collaborative process that spanned more than four years. During this time, DRCOG's policy committees, member governments, partner agencies, regional stakeholders and the community at large worked together to create a shared vision for action for shaping the future of the Denver metro area. The plan's shared vision of the future is captured in five overarching themes and 14 inter-related aspirational outcomes, which describe a future that DRCOG, local governments and partners will work toward together. **DRCOG may support or oppose legislative proposals that affect the ability of the region to achieve these outcomes and the associated performance measures and targets.**

Outcomes: Efficient and predictable development pattern

- The region is comprised of diverse, livable communities.
- Through a coordinated effort between DRCOG and local communities, new urban development occurs in an orderly and compact pattern within regionally designated areas.
- Connected urban centers and multimodal corridors accommodate a growing share of the region's housing and employment.

Outcomes: A connected multimodal region

- The regional transportation system is well-connected and serves all modes of travel.
- The transportation system is safe, reliable and well-maintained.

Outcomes: A safe and resilient built and natural environment

- The region has clean water and air, and lower greenhouse gas emissions.
- The region values, protects and connects people to its diverse natural resource areas, open space, parks and trails.



- The region's working agricultural lands and activities contribute to a strong regional food system.
- The risk and effects of natural and human-created hazards is reduced.

Outcomes: Healthy, inclusive and livable communities

- The built and natural environment supports healthy and active choices.
- The region's residents have expanded connections to health services.
- Diverse housing options meet the needs of residents of all ages, incomes and abilities.

Outcomes: A vibrant regional economy

- All residents have access to a range of transportation, employment, commerce, housing, educational, cultural and recreational opportunities.
- Investments in infrastructure and amenities allow people and businesses to thrive and prosper.





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.
- DRCOG supports federal policies and investments that help local governments and the private sector develop successful urban centers, including transit station 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. Additionally, DRCOG supports effective means to create and maintain supportive services for residents in affordable housing communities.
- DRCOG supports efforts to promote affordable housing options by:
 - 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 expansion of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, a critical tool for supporting private investment in the production and preservation of affordable housing in the state of Colorado and

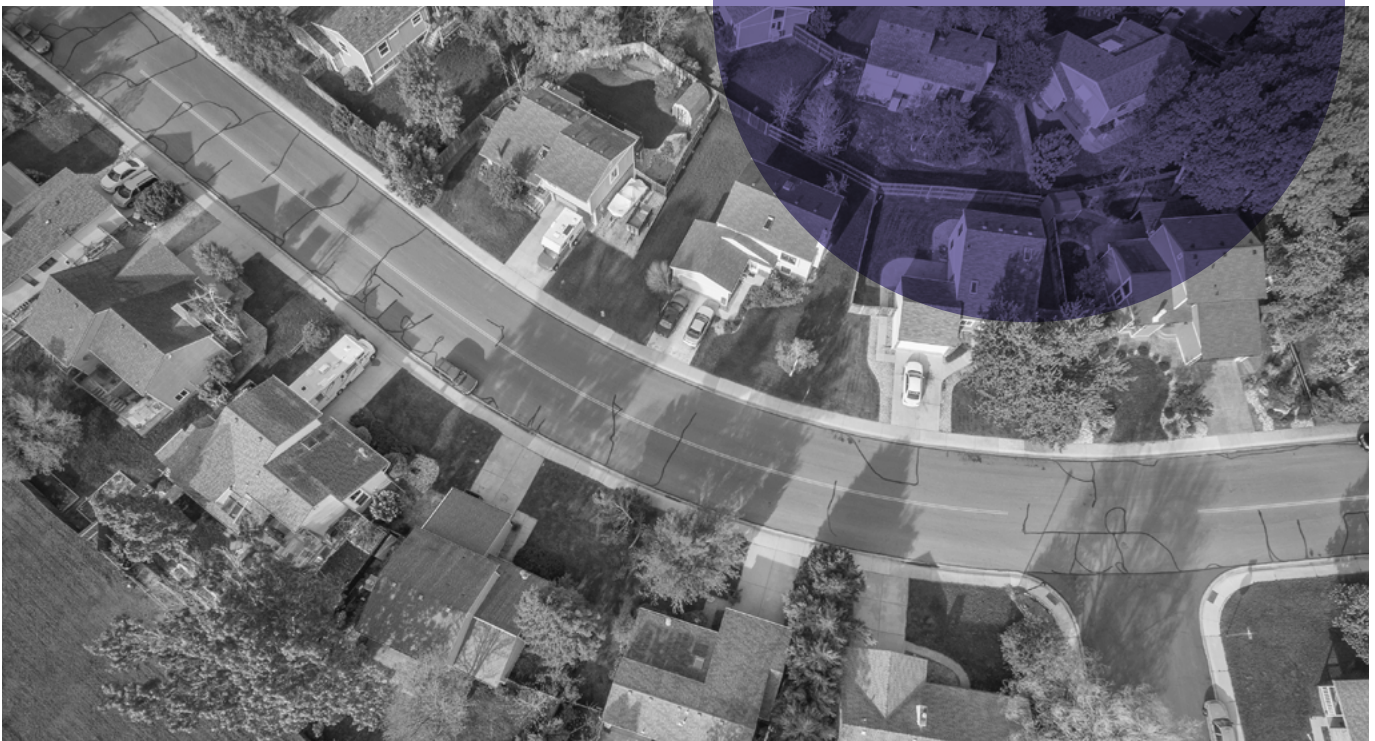


throughout the country, and efforts to strengthen communities through investments in transportation, economic opportunities, education, health services and other amenities that promote opportunity.

- Ensuring that renters and homeowners (including manufactured-home owners) have appropriate protections from discrimination and displacement. Policies should emphasize the rights of residents and minimize disparities in treatment under the law, while balancing the rights of property owners.
- 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 for people of all ages, incomes and abilities.
- Federal agencies and elected officials should 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 should ensure maximum local and regional participation in those decisions.

- The federal government should 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 and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- 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 reauthorized the Older Americans Act in 2020. Since the last full reauthorization (2016), the challenges to communities, states and the nation presented by the aging of the population have continued to accelerate across the U.S. but particularly in Colorado.

This critical national issue has continued to put pressure on services, especially the need for more tailored in-home and community-based services, the need for more focused prevention programs, the need for consumer advocacy in long-term care facilities, and increased support for family caregivers. After nearly 10 years of advocacy leadership by DRCOG and all members of the Colorado congressional delegation, the 2020 reauthorization finally addressed the funding imbalances in the existing Older Americans Act funding formula. The so-called "hold harmless" provision now will be phased out with Colorado (and DRCOG) already seeing significantly adjusted increases in funding. **It is critical for older adults across the DRCOG area to not have these federal funds offset by reductions in state funding as significant backlogs in providing services currently exist and DRCOG is being asked to provide unprecedented levels of support to older adults in response to COVID-19. DRCOG further adopts the following principles for current implementation and future reauthorization of the Older Americans Act.**



Eliminate obsolete funding provisions in the Older Americans Act

The population data used in the funding formula will need to be updated again after the 2020 census. Using the most up-to-date population numbers is critical so that all states receive the full distribution to which they are entitled under the Older Americans Act.

Encourage meaningful coordination with other systems and programs

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

- Require states, area agencies on aging, 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 adults, such as Older Americans Act, Medicaid, Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act 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. Department of Transportation funding.



- Avoid shifting the cost burden from cash-strapped programs such as Medicaid to the Older Americans Act programs, simply to bail out those programs.
- Strengthen the collaboration between the area agencies on aging 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.

Establish a federal services identification database for senior services

To better provide coordinated services to seniors, DRCOG supports the creation of a federal database which will summarize all care that a patient is receiving regardless of which federal agency is providing the care. Currently, DRCOG has no ability to understand the complete umbrella of services a patient is receiving because there is no way to access information about that patient outside of the information that DRCOG has. This data sharing will allow the Area Agency on Aging to better shape and provide services for aging adults.



Maximize flexibility in use of Older Americans Act funds

Most federal funding provided to state and local entities under the federal Older Americans Act is specifically earmarked to particular services. Although all of the Older Americans Act-funded services, such as meals and transportation, are critically important, the area agencies on aging, local governments and service providers are in the best position to assess the specific needs in the local areas. Funding flexibility to meet local needs has been particularly important to the success of the Aging Network in Colorado in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Increased flexibility in the use of program funds would allow area agencies on aging to better meet the needs of older adults.

- Simplify rules and regulations to allow better coordination of senior services thus enabling area agencies on aging 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 III C-2 home-delivered meal programs could be merged.
- Create flexibility in state- and federally specified allotments of Older Americans Act funds allowing area agencies on aging to use regional priorities to determine funding distributions at the local level, consistent with the goals of the act.
- Set required local match at 10% and required state match at 5% across all programs of the Older Americans Act. Currently, required local and state funding match percentages vary widely. For example, state/local match for the National Family Caregiver Support Program is 25%, while the Nutrition and Supportive Services Programs require a 15% state/local match. In some cases, states can completely opt out of providing a state match, as with the National Family Caregiver Support Program.



- Congress and the administration should, in consultation with the states and area agencies on aging, implement the lessons learned from the experience with the pandemic on an ongoing basis.

Fund aging-related planning for local communities

The 2006 reauthorization established new requirements for area agencies on aging 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 ensure 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 Older Americans Act programs

The funding provided through the Older Americans Act has proved critical in maintaining a quality standard of living for many of the nation's older adults. For years, however, Older Americans Act 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 Older Americans Act-funded services, such as Meals on Wheels, rides to medical appointments and in-home care, have burgeoned throughout the country.

Compounding these problems, the coming expiration of pandemic relief funding and 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 Older Americans Act programs. At the same time, there are proposals for addressing the nation's long-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, have had devastating consequences for vulnerable older adults in the metro area and across Colorado. Congress should fund the Older Americans Act 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 Older Americans Act programs, which are necessary to catch up with the lag in historical funding. DRCOG supports the position of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, which is advocating total funding for Older Americans Act be increased to at least the inflation- and population-adjusted 2010 levels to restore the service capacity of Older Americans Act programs, with special attention to Title III B Supportive Services, Title III E National Family

Caregiver Support Program and Title VII State Long-Term Care Ombudsman program, as these programs have had no relief from the sequester.

- Future authorized appropriations at levels adequate to fund all identified needs but at least commensurate with the rates of growth in inflation and the economically and socially needy older population. Congress also should change budget rules to allow credit for discretionary programs that save money in mandatory programs.
- In general, priority for funding should be given to those Older Americans Act programs and services that:
 - Emphasize assisting clients to live in their homes as long and as independently as possible.
 - Support evidence-based health and wellness programs.
 - Bridge the gap between community services and health care through programs that promote care transitions and care coordination and encourage community-based service delivery models, including broader experimentation with Accountable Health Communities to





integrate social needs in the delivery of health services and the establishment of local community care hubs.

- Increase the funding for family caregiver support services (including training, respite care, counseling, and information and assistance) and the continued distribution of these monies through area agencies on aging, which are important to address the growing needs of families who provide extensive care to their loved ones.
- Increase funding for Long-Term Care Ombudsman programs, which are necessary to improve the ability to respond to complaints and safeguard residents' rights.

Provide a path for private sector investment in Older Americans Act services

As part of the Older Americans Act reauthorization, as well as other federal programs like Medicare Advantage Plans, Congress has allowed for area agencies on aging, outside of the Older Americans Act, to engage in private pay, integrated care and other arrangements to expand services. **Congress and the administration should incentivize such activities, including funding demonstration projects and evaluations of the benefits of community-based services in improving health care outcomes and reducing care costs.**

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 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 is an ongoing issue in advocacy for the rights of residents. Occasionally legislation has been proposed to enhance families' access to information about the quality of care in nursing homes and 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 full 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 Older Americans Act. 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 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 area agencies on aging 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 use area agencies on aging in implementing these Affordable Care Act 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 and federal programs.
 - DRCOG supports increased prescription drug pricing transparency.
 - DRCOG supports revisions to the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit to simplify the application process and coverage offered, as well as cap out-of-pocket costs and address the gaps in coverage to provide a more comprehensive prescription medication benefit for all beneficiaries.
 - DRCOG supports allowing the federal government to negotiate prescription drug prices for patients using Medicare, Medicaid and other federal programs to lower cost to these critical federal programs.
- DRCOG also encourages the federal government to provide additional funding for area agencies on aging 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, the 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.
- 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.

- Promote 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 is an essential component of multidimensional efforts to advance economic development, industry growth and competitiveness; reduce the nation's dependency on fossil fuels; increase job access and mobility; and create communities having a high quality of life for people of all ages, incomes and abilities.



TRANSPORTATION

Funding

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (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. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act was signed into law on Nov. 15, 2021. The act makes a significant investment in infrastructure and includes the federal transportation authorization for fiscal year 2022 through fiscal year 2026. While the act boosts federal transportation spending over the previous FAST Act levels, federal transportation investments will remain significantly below the needs identified in 2008 and 2009.

DRCOG supports 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 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.
- Synchronizes with other broad public policy objectives (and may include energy independence, environmental protection, and workforce housing).

As Congress and the U.S. Department of Transportation consider additional transportation issues and rulemaking for the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, DRCOG will evaluate each for consistency with the following policies.

- DRCOG supports an energy-efficient, environmentally sustainable, multimodal transportation system that ensures America's economic competitiveness and supports livable communities for its residents.
- DRCOG supports providing additional transportation revenues to accomplish this vision.
- Any new or increased sources of funding should be distributed through **existing funding formulas** with the greatest possible share going directly to local areas to decide how it will be spent.
- 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 (geographic/return on dollar).
- Continue and expand funding for transportation projects that improve air quality.
- Congress should include a number of safeguards before earmarking transportation funds or modifying any discretionary programs, including ensuring transparency of the earmarking process; fully funding each phase of an earmarked project (no partial funding earmarks should be approved); not reducing formula funds that would affect projects already in an approved Transportation Improvement Program.
- 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.

DRCOG supports both short- and long-term federal funding policies to provide additional investment in the nation's infrastructure.

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.
- Reduce federal obstacles to options available to states and localities such as tolling, congestion pricing and public-private partnerships.
- Further expand current federal credit programs.

Long-term

- Carbon tax or trading programs (if Congress imple-



ments such a program) should ensure transportation activities that reduce greenhouse gas emissions receive a proportionate share of any new revenue generated by such programs.

- Transition to a new, more direct user-based system such as a road usage charge. This includes:
 - 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 vehicle miles traveled and congestion.
 - A national public education program.
 - A national pilot program.

Multimodal solutions

Addressing the nation's transportation challenges requires investment in a comprehensive, multifaceted approach. The nation will need to implement multimodal alternatives to provide congestion relief, improve air quality, reduce household transportation costs and increase independence for people unable to drive because of age, income or ability. DRCOG's Metro Vision plan includes targets for reducing vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions per capita, traffic fatalities, traffic congestion and single-occupant vehicle mode share.

Transit is an essential part of the metropolitan transportation system. Implementation of the Denver region's transit system is a high priority for DRCOG. Unfortunately, cost increases and revenue decreases forced the Regional Transportation District and DRCOG to remove some corridors from the fiscally constrained 2040 Regional Transportation Plan. DRCOG recognizes the importance of making transit-supportive improvements to bus and rail corridors throughout the region. The metro area has made a significant commitment of local resources for the regional transit system.

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

- Maintain and expand funding programs that allow states and planning regions to develop, fund and implement integrated transportation solutions should be maintained and expanded. In addition, transportation funding must allow flexibility to address the multimodal, energy and environmental needs of individual urban areas.
- Establish national performance objectives and measures for increasing access and mobility for people of all ages, incomes and abilities should be established in addition to those for traffic congestion.
- Permit flexibility to allow each state and region to decide how to best make investments to show progress toward national safety, mobility and accessibility goals.
- Expand the 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.

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.
- Support federal funding for the Front Range Passenger Rail project through a direct appropriation or increased funding to the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) for the project.
- Continue to provide federal funding for the FasTracks corridors (over time this could include corridors that have had to be removed from the fiscally constrained regional transportation plan).
- Clarify with regard to transit-oriented developments that up to a half-mile from an existing or proposed transit station, parking and transportation infra-



structure, transit-oriented development 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 Interstate 70 corridor from Denver International Airport 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.

Metropolitan mobility

Metropolitan areas account for nearly 86% of the U.S. population and around 90% of employment, income, and production of goods and services (source: U.S. Conference of Mayors, Sept. 30, 2019). Growing congestion and reduced travel reliability, along with deteriorating infrastructure, threaten the ability of



regions and the nation to compete globally.

Metropolitan areas 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.

DRCOG supports actions that minimize the barriers to the use of alternatives to the single-occupant vehicle 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.

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 mobility and accessibility with focus on:
 - Increased accessibility, modal choices and seamless transfers.



- Elimination of traffic chokepoints and reduction of severe traffic congestion.
- Strategies that manage transportation demand, provide transit service and implement nonmotorized methods of travel.
- Strategies for accommodating inter-regional movement of people and goods within and through the metropolitan areas.
- 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 existing traffic congestion and motor vehicle emissions measures and consider vehicle miles traveled, reduction, economic development, environmental sustainability, global competitiveness, accessibility, etc.

Energy efficiency and environmental sustainability

Transportation plays a key role in achieving energy independence and addressing some of the nation's



environmental concerns. In the United States today, more than 60% of every barrel of oil is used by the transportation sector, and transportation sources accounted for 26% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in 2016 (source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 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 greenhouse gas 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 nonvehicle transportation options and reduce vehicle miles traveled, through techniques including scenario planning and investments in projects that improve accessibility.
- Add public transit projects that enhance mobility, 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.

Project delivery and planning

The scope and complexity of transportation planning has increased significantly, including new performance-based planning requirements, rapidly changing vehicle technology, and changing job access and mobility needs. Efforts to streamline project planning and delivery are important but must be balanced against appropriate levels of regional and local coordination and environmental assessment.





DRCOG supports the following policies that promote efficiency, stability and reliability of funding, project delivery and planning:

- Allow metropolitan planning organizations to directly contract with subrecipients for non-infrastructure projects using federal funds.
- 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 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.
- Increase the authority of metropolitan planning organizations to employ solutions at the regional

level and provide regions and local governments the direct authority, flexibility, and funding to create a safe and efficient transportation system.

- Provide maximum flexibility so that comparatively minor changes to the planned or programmed highway and transit network do not require a full air quality conformity analysis at taxpayer expense.

DRCOG supports clarifying and enhancing the role of the metropolitan planning organization.

- 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 state and local transit operators, determine the best mix of transportation investments to meet the long-term transportation needs of a metropolitan area. **This important role must be strengthened to make metropolitan transportation planning successful.**
- The FAST Act requires adequate regional financial



forecasts be developed with the cooperation and collaboration of the state, MPO and public transit agency for use in preparing transportation plans. However, “collaboration, cooperation and consultation” are poorly defined in the context of developing such financial forecasts. States are given 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 (DRCOG, the Regional Transportation District and the Colorado Department of Transportation) to agree upon procedures governing the projection of future revenue estimates.
- Requiring all three agencies to agree upon distribution of estimated revenues.
- Establishing an external appeals process

to the U.S. Department of Transportation if there is disagreement among the parties regarding estimate procedures and revenues.

- **The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act strengthened consultation requirements for Surface Transportation Block Grant funds that are allocated to areas based on population.**

DRCOG supports:

- Expanding current regulations to require all three entities to agree upon 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 Department of Transportation and local transit agency, requiring the three entities to cooperatively establish a process for addressing project cost overruns.
- Requiring revenue suballocation to transportation management areas (MPOs representing populations greater than 200,000) to be based on the total population within the MPO boundary.
- Establishing a population-based air quality severity formula for suballocating Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds within a state and requiring suballocation of Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds to non-attainment MPOs representing populations greater than 200,000 on the basis of the total populations within the MPO boundary.



ENVIRONMENT

Water conservation

Water is a particularly scarce resource in the Denver region and the western United States, and a key consideration in planning for future growth and development. Recognizing this fact, the DRCOG Board of Directors added a 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 effort.**





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 cleanup 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 cleanup of Superfund sites

Community participation. Local governments often face significant community and neighborhood concerns regarding contaminated sites. Public involvement in the assessment, planning and cleanup 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 cleanup and land-use decision-making process are appropriate and necessary**

Funding for cleanup. 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 cleanup to the extent they are sufficient to make**



significant progress toward the act's goals. Allocation of cleanup 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.**







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