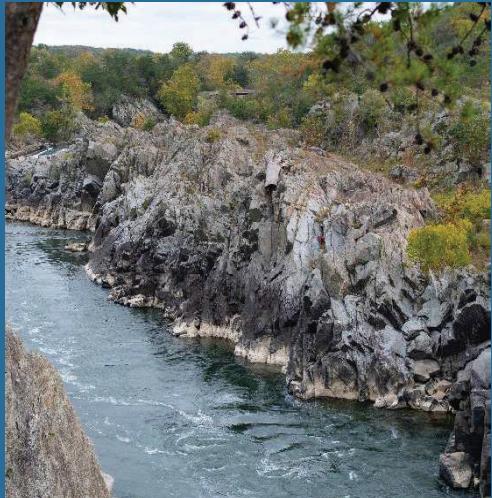


LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Supporting the region's goals for world-class transit, roadway safety, affordable housing, environmental protection, and more.

January 2026



Metropolitan Washington
Council of Governments

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Adopted by the COG Board of Directors on _____

ABOUT COG

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is an independent, nonprofit association that brings area leaders together to address major regional issues in the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia. COG's membership is comprised of 300 elected officials from 24 local governments, the Maryland and Virginia state legislatures, and U.S. Congress.

CREDITS

COG 2026 Legislative Committee

Editors:

Monica Beyrouti Nunez, mbeyrouti@mwcog.org, (202) 962-3212

Transportation: Kanti Srikanth, ksrikanth@mwcog.org, (202) 962-3257

Water & Food Security: Steven Bieber, sbieber@mwcog.org, (202) 962-3219

Climate & Energy: Jeff King, jking@mwcog.org, (202) 962-3238

Housing and Human Services: Hilary Chapman, hchapman@mwcog.org, (202) 962-3346

Emergency Preparedness: Scott Boggs, sboggs@mwcog.org, (202) 962-3268

Photo Credits: Metro train (WMATA); Bike Lane (BeyondDC/Flickr)

ACCOMMODATIONS POLICY

Alternative formats of this document are available upon request. Visit

www.mwcog.org/accommodations or call (202) 962-3300 or (202) 962-3213 (TDD).

TITLE VI NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) operates its programs without regard to race, color, and national origin and fully complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes and regulations prohibiting discrimination in all programs and activities. For more information, to file a Title VI related complaint, or to obtain information in another language, visit www.mwcog.org/nondiscrimination or call (202) 962-3300.

El Consejo de Gobiernos del Área Metropolitana de Washington (COG) opera sus programas sin tener en cuenta la raza, el color, y el origen nacional y cumple con el Título VI de la Ley de Derechos Civiles de 1964 y los estatutos y reglamentos relacionados que prohíben la discriminación en todos los programas y actividades. Para más información, presentar una queja relacionada con el Título VI, u obtener información en otro idioma, visite www.mwcog.org/nondiscrimination o llame al (202) 962-3300.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING, PLANNING, & CONNECTIVITY

Support DMVMoves Initiative's Funding Recommendations for Metro and Local Transit

DMVMoves is a joint-initiative by COG and Metro to develop a shared vision for the future of the region's transit network and identify sustainable, long-term, dedicated funding sources to support it. The DMVMoves Plan, endorsed by the COG and Metro Boards, calls for ongoing capital investments in Metro, addressing the unmet funding needs of commuter rail and local/commuter bus systems, and other actions to improve transit service delivery and inter-jurisdictional coordination to make the regional transit system function more like an integrated and seamless network. Given the critical role a safe, reliable and efficient transit system is for the region and the economy of Maryland and Virginia overall, it is a top priority for state and local leaders to advance the necessary legislation and budget actions to:

- Commit an additional \$460M a year that grows 3 percent annually and is dedicated for Metro's capital needs.
- Support state, regional and local actions necessary to provide for the operating and capital needs of the commuter rail and local bus systems.
- Support commuter rail and local/commuter bus systems to improve transit service delivery and inter-jurisdictional connection and coordination to make the regional transit system function more like an integrated and seamless network.

Support Indexed Federal Funding for the Region's Metro System

The Metro system is the centerpiece of the metropolitan Washington transportation system and forms the backbone of its economy. Almost half of all federal employees use the Metrorail and bus system to commute to work. The federal government should act to permanently provide a larger share of both operating and capital funding for the Metro system, which its employees and the region depend on. Specifically, support making the federal government's annual appropriations for the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) permanent and index the funding amount to a sustainable and predictable level.

Support Fixing the Deficit in the Federal Highway Trust Fund

For more than two decades the federal Highway Trust Fund (HTF) revenue has been insufficient to fund the congressionally authorized surface transportation program. These shortfalls have been closed with transfers from general fund and other short-term measures, including in the reauthorization for federal transportation spending through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). The Congressional Budget Office projects that the balance in both the highway and transit accounts of the Highway Trust Fund will be exhausted in 2028. Support addressing this structural deficit and systemic imbalance of the HTF revenues as a top priority to provide certainty of federal funding for the surface transportation program and ensure that any fix to the HTF revenue structure retains all the programs included in the 2021 IIJA and fully funds them at levels authorized or previously envisioned.

Support Roadway & Pedestrian Safety

Safety on our roadways and for our pedestrians and bicyclists continues to be a priority for our region. Data for 2024 shows that roadway fatalities remain elevated compared to pre-pandemic levels and the region has yet to meet many of its annual highway safety targets. Although jurisdictions in the region have employed strategies related to the “E’s” of safety (engineering, education, enforcement, emergency medical services, and equity) to address this challenge, enhanced safety laws are needed to combat this crisis. Regional ticket reciprocity between Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia would improve the ability to hold drivers accountable for their actions across state lines. Enabling localities broader flexibility in the implementation of automated traffic cameras (i.e., in more locations beyond school and work zones) would also help to improve roadway safety as it is a proven countermeasure. And the growing prevalence of e-devices such as scooters and e-bikes demands new approaches such as e-device registration to allow for their enforcement, as well as the need to change crash reporting forms to include a category that tracks e-device involved-crashes. In addition, because impaired driving remains a top contributing factor to crashes in the region, there is always interest in advancing legislation to deter it.

WATER QUALITY PROTECTION

Support Investments in Water Infrastructure & Water Quality Protection

Support appropriating the full authorized funding levels for water, wastewater, stormwater, and water reuse programs, including the Clean Water and Drinking Water SRFs, the EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program, the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA), Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA) and for state programs including grants for local governments and water utilities, and stormwater local assistance funds. Specifically, continued support for the Washington Metropolitan Area Backup Water Supply Feasibility Study. COG supports funding state revolving funds (SRFs) at the maximum authorization in federal law and making sure that funding for congressionally directed spending projects is in addition to the authorized SRF funding levels. Ensure that local water infrastructure investments to meet water quality permit load allocations and handle future population and economic growth are protected, specifically in the implementation of the revised Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. Invest in workforce training and development to ensure the availability of skilled workers to fill water sector jobs. Support funding for agricultural conservation programs.

Support Climate & Resiliency Initiatives

Support funding and policy to address robust scientific climate change analysis, adaptation and resiliency planning and coordinated local best practices for flood control, drought, and water storage and reuse. Support drinking water security and resiliency through research, planning, programs and funding to ensure a resilient, reliable, and clean drinking water supply for the region.

Ensure Regulatory Feasibility & Flexibility

Support actions that provide for flexible implementation and a feasible pace for future stormwater, water, and wastewater permits and other regulatory requirements, including reasonable reporting requirements. Support cost-effective scheduling and financing of water quality programs including streamlining permits, flexibility to achieve nutrient and sediment reduction across wastewater, stormwater, and other sectors to protect affordability of water. For PFAS regulation, COG supports policies that enforce the "polluter pays" principle for PFAS cleanup, ensuring those responsible for contamination are held accountable. In addition, COG supports an explicit legislative exemption from liability under CERCLA (Superfund) for water and wastewater systems, which are passive receivers of these pollutants.

Ensure Local Government Input

Ensure that local governments and wastewater and drinking water utilities are given opportunities to provide timely and meaningful input on the implementation of the revised Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, as well as legislation and management decisions affecting the Chesapeake Bay and local water quality. Encourage regional collaboration on updates to land-use policies around waterways and riverways.

CLIMATE RESILIENCY & AIR QUALITY PROTECTION

Support Policies to Meet the Region's Climate Goals

Expand policies, programs, and funding at federal, state, and local levels to help meet the region's medium- and long-term objectives in climate change mitigation. Ensure that local governments are recognized and given opportunities to provide timely and meaningful input on climate and clean energy policies and programs.

Support Accelerated Multi-Sector Actions to Reduce Greenhouse Gases and Criteria Pollutants

The region and its member jurisdictions are committed to addressing the adverse impacts of climate change including reducing the amount of harmful greenhouse gases (GHG) released in the atmosphere. Support accelerated actions across all sectors to help meet the region's 2030 climate and energy goals. Support engagement and continued funding at all levels of government to monitor the impacts of climate investment programs and GHG performance measures. Emphasize priority investments in Equity Emphasis Areas.

Ensure Sustainable Secure Energy Access for All

Advocate for state and federal actions to enhance access to secure, affordable clean energy. Prioritize and protect funding for energy-sector infrastructure to improve affordability, resilience and reliability. Support policies, funding, and incentives for energy efficiency and security improvements such as microgrids, district energy systems, and clean energy storage technology. Prioritize funding for upgrading energy infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events and to protect investments in grid technologies that improve energy efficiency and system performance. Encourage coordination among state regulators, regional transmission organizations, utilities, and local governments to accelerate transmission and distribution upgrades that reduce congestion, improve reliability, address affordability, and advance climate and equity goals. Emphasize the need for deployment and workforce development in low-income, energy-burdened, and vulnerable communities to ensure a just and equitable climate future for all.

Support Solar Deployment and Aggressive State Renewable Portfolio Standards

State requirements for a clean grid and aggressive Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS) and support for local efforts to deploy distributed solar on government facilities and in the community at scale are effective methods of increasing the amount of renewable electricity generated within a grid system driving greater deployment of renewable energy projects to meet the region's 2030 solar goals. Protect existing and advocate for more aggressive policies, including state RPS and other innovative policies and programs, business models, and funding opportunities that support meeting the RPS, such as supporting a strong Renewable Energy Credit (REC) market, solar carve-outs in RPS policies, Power Purchasing Agreements (PPAs), reasonable solar interconnection standards, offshore wind, community choice aggregation, and community solar opportunities for energy-burdened households.

Expand Clean Energy Innovation, Technology & Finance

Encourage and support responsible deployment of next-generation, zero- and low-carbon energy resources that can provide firm, flexible capacity to complement variable renewable generation and

support a reliable, decarbonized grid. Expand options for and improve access to clean energy finance at the state and local levels, including advocating for further investment in and deployment of capital through green banks. Foster cost effective and efficient market frameworks, reasonable regulatory frameworks, business model innovation incentives and partnerships that expand the adoption of energy efficient and zero energy building codes, building benchmarking, clean energy technologies and infrastructure, and low or zero-emission vehicles. Support policies and incentives to encourage the growth of technology manufacturing and sector workforce development in our region.

Support Aggressive Energy Efficiency Goals

Support state and local energy efficiency programs to reduce energy usage, costs, and associated greenhouse gas emissions in response to rapidly changing federal energy and climate policies. Advocate for aggressive initiatives to target households with high energy burdens. Prioritize support and incentives for weatherization, deep energy retrofits, building electrification and retro-commissioning programs to achieve the highest possible energy performance and preferably zero energy buildings within Equity Emphasis Areas and climate vulnerable communities of concern. Support policies and programs to address energy demand growth from high electricity use sectors such as data centers.

Enhance Incentives & Financing Mechanisms for Climate Resiliency

Support legislation, incentives, financing, and funding mechanisms to support deployment of grey blue, and green infrastructure resilient to extreme heat, flooding, and other climate hazards. Priority resilient infrastructure initiatives include the establishment of resilience hubs in climate vulnerable communities, improving the resilience of critical infrastructure (transportation, communication, energy and water system assets), equitably addressing urban heat island, enhance green infrastructure networks, providing for tree planting and preservation on privately owned lands, and implementing measures to reduce flood risk in climate vulnerable communities, such as restoring wetlands and enhancing green infrastructure to augment and improve stormwater management.

Support Policies that Preserve & Protect Regional Air Quality and Public Health

Support strong policies, regulations, and funding necessary to preserve improvements in air quality and strengthen the region's ability to meet current and future air quality standards that are protective of public health and welfare. Advocate for federal policies that support measures to mitigate the effects of wildfire risks on regional air quality. Consider environmental justice when implementing air quality policies, programs, and initiatives. Support local members' efforts to identify and implement initiatives to reduce air pollution and protect residents that live in areas with unhealthy levels of air pollution. Support regulatory actions to monitor and reduce air pollution transport into the region. Communicate with regional leaders and the public about improvements in air quality and the need for actions to reduce emissions and continue to meet air quality standards.

HOUSING AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Support Efforts to Equitably Increase the Supply of Housing & Promote Housing Affordability

Support legislation and programs (such as the ROAD to Housing Act and Neighborhood Homes Investment Act) to preserve and increase the supply of housing and housing choices to address the full spectrum of need in our region. Ensure that a sufficient supply of housing is preserved and produced as outlined in COG's 2030 Regional Housing Initiative targets. Support increasing the supply of a diverse range of housing unit types, sizes and price points that are affordable (both rental and homeownership) for our residents in the region's identified Activity Centers and Equity Emphasis Areas. Support efforts to eliminate barriers to the production of fair and affordable housing by encouraging new financing tools (for builders and buyers), streamlining development processes, and creating innovative regulatory reforms, such as adaptive re-use of commercial space, that results in the production of a greater variety of housing types and eliminate exclusionary zoning practices. Support legislation, policies, and practices that increase access to opportunity, reverse patterns of residential segregation, and create inclusive communities in concert with efforts to increase supply overall.

Strengthen Systems to Prevent & End the Experience of Homelessness

Support coordinated regional efforts to ensure that the experience of homelessness is rare, brief, and nonrecurring. Strengthen the capacity of local homeless services systems, including Continuums of Care, to engage in long-term, strategic planning aimed at reducing homelessness and improving system performance over time. Advocate for federal actions and resources that sustain core homelessness programs and services that promote long-term housing stability, including, case management, behavioral health care, diversion, housing navigation, and other essential wrap-around supports. Expand the production and preservation of deeply affordable and supportive housing to meet regional needs and help residents maintain stable, independent living. Maintain strong federal, state, and local investments in rental assistance, eviction prevention, and legal aid for tenants, landlords, and moderate-income homeowners. Improve alignment between housing and health funding streams so that residents with complex needs can access appropriate care, treatment, and ongoing supports that reinforce long-term stability.

Support Alignment of Workforce Development & Job Creation

Support legislation to focus on workforce development and job creation at the local level, and efforts to develop industry standard credentialing and skills programs for sectors outside of the federal government. Support legislation and programs that fund local job development, career and technical education, and overall, more closely align education and job creation.

Support Local Governments & Activity Centers

Work with local governments to support sound land use planning which focuses on employer retention and new job growth in the region's mixed-use Activity Centers.

HOMELAND SECURITY AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Support Funding for Public Health Response

Support funding for public health to prevent, prepare for, and respond to public health emergencies and pandemics. Leverage new and existing funding mechanisms that would provide resources to carry out public health surveillance, reporting, infection control, vaccine distribution, laboratory testing, mass care, planning and exercises, communications and other public health activities. Invest in an adequate workforce capacity and capability to support public health infrastructure. Enact and support the development of more secure supply chain networks, with a focus on vulnerable populations, as it relates to personal protective equipment (PPE) and other life safety equipment used in the response of pandemics.

Support Cybersecurity Preparedness Initiatives

Support cybersecurity programs and initiatives that advance and improve cyber preparedness and response to current and emerging threats. Work with local and state partners to develop resiliency against future cybersecurity attacks and other virtual threats targeted at our citizens and the information technology infrastructure of our communities.

Support Regional Emergency Preparedness

Continue to support emergency response preparedness programs that advance and improve response preparedness to existing and emerging threats. Work with local and state partners to maximize the region's share of federal grant funds and use these funds to promote value added outcomes that continue to increase capacity, capability, and developed standards for regional response in the National Capital Region.

Increase Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Funding

The National Capital Region (NCR) receives UASI funding for efforts to address the multi-discipline planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercise needs of high-threat, high-density urban areas, and to assist in building and sustaining capabilities to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from threats or acts of terrorism using the whole community approach. As funding allocations are assessed, policy makers should recognize the complexity of challenges in the NCR that directly impact Federal government operations and security and support an increase in UASI funding to our region to effectively address the unique nexus of U.S. Federal, state, local, and international operations.

Support Resources for Violent Crime Reduction

Provide resources at the local, state and federal level to support the development, implementation and evaluation of strategies to prevent, intervene in, and respond to violent crime. Specifically, gun violence and the associated trauma inflicted on communities. Continue to provide Department of Justice grant funding to support violent crime reduction efforts at the local level.

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Support Efforts to Combat Substance Use Disorders

Work with local, state, and federal partners to increase resources to combat substance use disorders for all ages throughout the region which may include improving access to treatment and recovery services, promoting prevention education, reducing the stigma of drug disorders, supporting research on pain management, protecting harm reduction strategies, and ensuring awareness of overdose-reversing drugs.

Support Health Equity and Health Disparity Reduction

Support ongoing system reform that advances health equity and reduces health disparities, especially in maternal health outcomes. Health equity is the goal that every person is equally able to live a healthy life regardless of their background or circumstances. Health disparities are preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged racial, ethnic, and other population groups and communities. Ensure timely access to care for the health of all residents and the reduction of disparities in maternal morbidity and mortality by enacting policies that will assist counties in improving maternal health outcomes.

Increase Availability of and Access to Mental Health Services

Work with local, state, and federal partners to increase access to and availability of mental and behavioral health services, especially for youth, throughout the region. Include psychiatric hospital beds, counseling, telehealth, and other outpatient services; support culturally competent providers from diverse backgrounds; develop communication strategies to combat mental health stigma and promote mental wellness throughout communities. Continue expansion of crisis intervention, mental health courts, and diversion programs, where treatment is indicated rather than incarceration, especially for at-risk youth; and re-entry programs to reduce recidivism rates of mental health consumers.

Promote Family Preservation and Avoid Family Separation Due to Citizenship Status

Work with local partners to prioritize efforts that prevent family separation due to deportation or citizenship status. Advocate for policies that safeguard families of varying citizenship status by promoting alternatives to family separation and ensuring their placement within supportive family or community settings when separation is unavoidable. Emphasize strategies to strengthen family preservation services. Collaborate with child welfare systems to maximize funding and resources to address the increased caseload resulting from family separations, ensuring children have access to critical support services and stable placements during these challenging transitions.

Increase Recruitment and Support for Foster Children and Resource Parents

Support initiatives to address the critical shortage of resource parents by enhancing recruitment efforts and providing adequate support and resources to retain them. This includes offering targeted community outreach efforts to raise awareness of the need for foster families. Increase recruitment tools by promoting collaboration among jurisdictions to share events, resources, and best practices that effectively engage potential resource parents.

FOOD SECURITY & HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

Defend and Strengthen Programs to Reduce Childhood Poverty and Support Nutrition & Health

Protect and expand access to free school meals for all students. Strengthen and simplify programs such as Summer EBT and Summer Meals and deploy or strengthen policies like the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit that reduce childhood poverty and food insecurity. Enhance farm-to-school and provide healthier food and drink options for children wherever meals are served or sold.

Improve Food Security & Healthy Food Access

Increase food and flexible cash assistance to residents in need, including children and their families, college students, adults, seniors, and veterans. Support efforts to reverse recent changes to SNAP that increase administrative burdens to applicants and administrators, reduce current and future benefit amounts, restrict eligibility, and shift program costs to states. Support any allied initiatives to undo negative Medicaid changes which will have cascading detrimental consequences to the availability of free school meals. Invest in reducing SNAP error rates, modernizing programs, protecting participants from fraud, and replacing stolen funds. Advocate for revenue policies (i.e., extreme wealth tax) to address gaps in federal food assistance and poverty reduction programs. Support innovative initiatives for food insecure residents not eligible for federal programs. Address disparities in food security and healthy food access among communities of color. Support culturally responsive policies and practices that protect the dignity and safety of food assistance recipients from immigrant communities. Promote SNAP acceptance among small/ local vendors. Invest in programs that improve access to local and regional healthy food, including access on college campuses, at food banks and pantries, farmers markets and CSAs, food hubs, grocery, point-of-choice initiatives, and through food as medicine initiatives.

Support Small Farmers & Food System Resilience

Institutionalize and fund programs like Local Food for Schools/Childcare and Local Food Purchase Agreement Programs. Address land loss issues such as Heirs Property and support farmland preservation, healthy soils, land access strategies and programs, and transition to the next generation of small farmers. Center the unique experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in legislative proposals, and policy and program development to facilitate greater access to land ownership, capital, and markets. Increase resources and improve policies that promote values-based group purchasing and institutional procurement initiatives from the region's farms. Streamline benefit program payments for farmers and promote use of public lands for community food production. Recognize indigenous food security priorities and rights.

Support Local Food Entrepreneurs, Businesses, & Workforce Development

Strengthen entrepreneurialism, cooperative development, and workforce development programs in the regional food economy which will result in increased employment opportunities with living wages. Target investments to address inequities faced by communities of color. Create career pipelines and improve health and safety for food/agriculture workers. Invest in regional food production and distribution infrastructure to support small businesses including subsidized regional commercial kitchen space.