



2026 Legislative Breakfast Meeting Minutes

12-17-25

In-person

Member/Representative Attendance:

✓	Barkhamsted , Meaghan Cook	✓	Harwinton , Michael Criss		Roxbury , Patrick Roy
✓	Burlington , Doug Thompson	✓	Kent , Eric Epstein	✓	Salisbury , Curtis Rand
✓	Canaan , David Barger	✓	Litchfield , Denise Raap		Sharon , Casey Flanagan
	Colebrook , Bradley Bremer	✓	Morris , Tom Weik	✓	Torrington , Molly Spino
✓	Cornwall , Gordon Ridgway	✓	New Hartford , Dan Jerram		Warren , Greg LaCava
	Goshen , Seth Breakell	✓	Norfolk , Henry Tirrell		Washington , Jim Brinton
	Hartland , Magi Winslow		North Canaan , Jesse Bunce		Winchester , Todd Arcelaschi

Others in Attendance:

NHCOG Staff: Annmarie Ryan, Leo Ghio, Erik Shortell, Rista Malanca, Rob Phillips

Legislators: Senator Paul Honig, Representative Maria Horn, Representative Mark Anderson, Representative Joe Canino, Representative Karen Reddington-Hughes

Guests: Tim Waldron – Eversource

1. Call to Order and Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 8:05AM by Chairman Jerram. The format and legislator introductions were made by E.D. Phillips

2. Summary of Draft NHCOG Legislative Priorities

Michael Criss, Chairman - Legislative Committee and NHCOG Board Vice-Chairman discussed COG positions in general as a backdrop to the focus sessions that were to begin.

3. Focus Sessions on Priorities of Local and Regional Interest. Staff moderated.

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

- Establish Sustainable, Inflation-Responsive Transit Funding
- Create escalator funding for transit programs to ensure funding keeps pace with inflation, vehicle maintenance costs, and workforce wages.
- Increase Section 5310 operating and capital funding and establish a rural funding track that recognizes high vehicle mileage, aging fleets, and geographic service demands unique to rural regions.
- Require periodic audits of Section 5310 recipients to ensure funding supports regional transit systems and is not fragmented across individual municipal efforts.

Workshop participants consistently identified driver shortages, rising fuel and maintenance costs, and an aging population as immediate threats to existing transit services. Without escalator funding, service reductions are inevitable.

- Strengthen Rural Transit Access & Service Design
- Expand and formalize CTDOT's micro-transit pilot program with a goal of permanent on-demand service in rural and underserved areas.
- Prioritize transit connections to:
 - Employment centers
 - Schools and higher education
 - Medical appointments
 - Commercial and service hubs
- Increase availability of dial-a-ride services to meet senior and mobility-limited resident needs.

Northwest Transit is currently the sole provider serving the entire Northwest Corner, and legislators heard strong consensus that existing fixed-route service does not adequately meet rural travel patterns

- Reform the Transportation Rural Improvement Program (TRIP)
- Increase TRIP funding to reflect rural municipalities' ineligibility for many federal transportation programs.
- Streamline TRIP reimbursement timelines to prevent cost escalation due to delayed fund release.
- Align TRIP project specifications more closely with municipal standards to avoid unnecessary cost inflation.

Towns reported that delays in TRIP fund disbursement and elevated engineering specifications increase project costs for both municipalities and the State

- Municipal Grant Program (MGP) Reforms
- Amend MGP statutes to allow unspent funds to roll over year-to-year, rather than reverting to the State.
- Improve technical assistance so municipalities can fully utilize allocated funds.
- Allow MGP funds to remain within the region if not immediately expended.

Workshop discussions highlighted that many towns struggle to deploy MGP funds within current timelines, undermining program effectiveness

- Address Road & Culvert Failures
- Increase state funding for feeder roads and connector roads that carry high traffic volumes but are locally maintained.
- Provide cost relief for culvert replacements impacted by DEEP requirements that mandate silt-bottom structures instead of standard piping.
- Fund alternative road maintenance techniques (e.g., crack sealing) to extend pavement life and reduce long-term costs.

Municipal officials reported widespread culvert failures, deteriorating road conditions, and escalating project costs tied to regulatory requirements

- Dead, Dying & Hazardous Trees
- Establish a dedicated state funding formula for tree maintenance and removal, including ash trees and invasive species.
- Expand utility right-of-way authority to allow earlier intervention for trees threatening power lines.

PUBLIC SAFETY

- Resident State Troopers & Police Accountability
- Control Resident Trooper program costs and ensure resident troopers can dedicate sufficient time to their assigned towns, rather than being diverted by mandatory overtime.
- Review recruitment incentives, retirement structures, and attrition rates to address long-term staffing shortages.
- Amend the Police Accountability Act to:
 - Reduce administrative and equipment burdens on small towns
 - Account for towns without municipal police departments
- Fire & EMS Sustainability
- Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for ambulance transports.
- Review firefighter turnout gear mandates to reduce financial strain on volunteer departments.
- Fund early-career exposure programs in schools to build a public safety workforce pipeline.
- Provide recruitment and retention incentives for volunteer EMS and fire personnel.
- Speeding & Traffic Enforcement
- Expand enforcement authority for repeat or egregious speeding violations, including registration holds or license suspension.
- Continue collaboration with State Police, which has shown measurable enforcement benefits in rural towns.

EDUCATION & MUNICIPAL FINANCE

- Reform Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR)
- Repeal or substantially reform MBR to reflect declining enrollment trends.
- Provide towns with mid-fiscal-year adjustment mechanisms to respond to unexpected special education costs.
- Strengthen Special Education Funding Oversight
- Increase Excess Cost Grant funding.
- Expand HQSEI incentives to reduce reliance on out-of-district placements.
- Require greater transparency and oversight of BOE year-end surpluses.

- Enhance Board of Finance authority over BOE budgets, particularly in regional school districts.
- Veterans & Homestead Tax Relief
- Correct implementation flaws in the Veterans Exemption program and create a state reimbursement mechanism to prevent local tax shifts.
- Explore income-based relief tools (e.g., income tax credits or deductions) to reduce over-reliance on property tax exemptions.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY RELIEF

- Incentivize business development in rural regions through targeted tax and R&D deductions applicable to LLCs and small businesses.
- Address regulatory burdens such as paid sick leave mandates that disproportionately impact small employers.
- Authorize taxation parity for short-term rentals (e.g., AirBnB) to capture currently lost municipal revenue.
- Expand façade improvement and neighborhood revitalization funding to prioritize reuse of existing housing stock.

4. **The meeting adjourned at 9:30AM**

Respectfully submitted,

NHCOG staff