

2014 Legislative Initiatives

Transportation Funding Restoration – Funding to local governments has been reduced significantly over the past several years as the State has worked to address its structural deficit. The largest of these reductions has been to Highway User Revenues (HUR), an unprecedented 95% reduction, which has made it extremely difficult for local governments to maintain and improve their local roadways. Prior to these reductions taking place, local governments received 30% of HUR and the State received 70%. Now local governments are receiving just under 10% of these revenues. A former Commission recommended the incremental restoration of HUR back to the original shared distribution and a new task force will look at HUR as a part of its charge. MACo urges state policymakers to evaluate highway funding and the effects of these drastic local reductions to Maryland’s roadways -- and to take necessary steps to restore HUR and local roadway infrastructure.

Empowering School Board/County Partnerships – Local school boards and county governments share the responsibility for the education and well-being of schoolchildren. Creating a “fast track” state approval for local agreements on funding initiatives will encourage school boards and county governments to uncover new cost-saving strategies and improve the effectiveness of both system operations and classroom education. Reducing disincentives for discretionary education funding can encourage county support for innovative pilot programs, and more fairly recognize short-term needs or investments as outside perpetual funding mandates.

Leverage Bay Restoration Funds to Target Failing Septics – As counties struggle to reduce water pollution under the Chesapeake Bay and local Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), MACo has advocated that counties be given a broad array of “tools” to help them meet their water quality goals. One cost-effective and environmentally responsible “tool” would be to expand when septic system monies within the Bay Restoration Fund may be used to extend public sewer to failing septic systems. The 2011 Task Force on Sustainable Growth and Wastewater Disposal supported the expansion provided there were safeguards against sprawl development occurring along the extension. Legislation could require an exception process and include adequate safeguards.

Collaborative Public Safety Radio Systems – Maryland FiRST is a statewide radio communication system which will improve police, fire, and emergency management communications for our first responders, allowing them to more effectively and efficiently respond to emergency situations within certain regions and across county lines. Counties who choose to participate in this statewide system will realize seamless “interoperability” and lower infrastructure, equipment, and maintenance costs through shared resources. Shared State and county efforts require a commitment from all levels of government and a structure to ensure the operational needs of all users are considered. The creation of a governance board with committed representatives of the State and county partners will protect everyone’s interests and provide county users with a role in the system’s oversight and management, including infrastructure sharing coordination, network prioritization, standardized operations, and financial decisions.