



## **WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS 2021/2022 LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM**

### ***INTRODUCTION***

The 2021/2022 WRCOG Legislative Platform (Platform) is designed to provide guidance to WRCOG and its member agencies on legislation that focuses on issues of mutual concern. Positions adopted by the WRCOG Executive Committee will be forwarded to Sacramento, Washington D.C., and interested parties, as appropriate. By adopting this Platform, the Executive Committee provides guidance to WRCOG staff in expressing its member interests to State and federal legislators. The Platform is adopted by WRCOG at the start of the State's two-year legislative session.

Typically, items of legislative interest are brought to WRCOG's attention by WRCOG's member agencies, which desire WRCOG to take a position on the item, in order to demonstrate a united subregional stance on a particular issue. WRCOG does not currently employ full time legislative staff or lobbyists, and therefore has limited ability to commit significant time to legislative activities. For the *General Platform Components* described below, staff will, to the extent possible, monitor legislation that falls within the scope of the adopted Platform and use the Platform as a guide to respond to issues and/or requests raised by WRCOG's member agencies. Staff will strive to also provide information on the impacts of such legislation to member agencies through WRCOG's existing committee structure.

In 2010, WRCOG established the following Agency priorities, which are listed below under *General Platform Components*: economic development, education, energy and environment, health, transportation, water, and legislative advocacy. In 2012, WRCOG's Executive Committee further reinforced these General Platform Components through the adoption of its Economic Development and Sustainability Framework. The Economic Development and Sustainability Framework was created based on the identification of gaps towards fostering a more sustainable region and what roles WRCOG could play in helping fill those gaps. The Framework also provides four general categories of roles for WRCOG:

1. Advocacy
2. Convene a Dialogue
3. Facilitate Local Action
4. Act Regionally

The Platform will continue to build upon the Economic Development and Sustainability Framework to ensure these established goals continue to guide WRCOG's role in addressing these and other issues at the subregional level and ensure that WRCOG may expand the institutional structure to help fill in gaps not met by current programs and policies already serving Western Riverside County.

In addition to the *General Platform Components*, housing and economic development are identified as *Priority Issue Areas*, recognizing the acute impact of the statewide housing crisis on the WRCOG subregion and the importance of economic development in ensuring a more prosperous future. For these *Priority Issue Areas*, to the extent possible, staff will engage in more targeted lobbying efforts by, for example, working with WRCOG leadership to coordinate targeted engagement with elected leaders at the State level who represent the subregion and/or sit on relevant Senate and Assembly subcommittees, and/or engage with State agency staff,



such as the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) or the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz).

Generally, when WRCOG seeks to adopt an official position on an item consistent with this Legislative Platform, the item will be presented to WRCOG's standing committees, as appropriate, for review and comment, and to the Executive Committee for final approval. If urgent action is needed, the WRCOG Executive Director and/or the Executive Committee Chair may submit position letters and/or undertake other tasks that may be necessary on legislative matters; such actions would be consistent with this Platform. These actions will be reported at subsequent meetings of the WRCOG Committees.

### ***PLATFORM PRIORITY AREAS: HOUSING and ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT***

Housing and Economic Development are interrelated issues that are anticipated to acutely impact WRCOG and its member agencies over the two-year legislative cycle, and have therefore been identified as specific priority areas for WRCOG to engage with over the legislative cycle. These priority areas have also been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and WRCOG is committed to supporting and promoting economic recovery and resiliency for the subregion and its member agencies.

**Background:** California faces an ongoing housing crisis. State officials estimate that an average of 180,000 homes need to be built annually to contend with the growing population, though, in 2019, only 116,000 housing permits were issued. The funding gap created by the 2012 dissolution of redevelopment agencies—the largest source of public funding for housing development—has not been adequately filled since. Increasing construction materials prices and excessive regulation contribute to skyrocketing housing costs unmatched by growth of household incomes. Over the past 20 years, the median cost of rental housing in the state has increased by 116 percent while median household incomes have risen by only 69 percent. Though inland southern California housing costs are generally lower than state averages, local incomes are also lower, averaging \$96,000 per year compared to \$114,000.

Not only is the availability of housing a challenge but the ability to afford housing for many residents continues to exacerbate the housing crisis, around 370,000 households in Riverside County lack the income to meet their basic needs with 41% of households spending more than 30% of their income on housing. Additionally, two-thirds of Western Riverside County residents commute outside of the subregion for work and employment throughout the County are in industries like retail, hospitality, and warehousing, which often provides low wage jobs and lack full-time benefits which continues to perpetuate the subregion's jobs-housing imbalance. More importantly, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have only accelerated many of the economic hardships already felt by many in the inland region and a focus on economic recovery and resiliency are imperative towards realizing a better future for our residents.

**Issue:** In the last four years, the California legislature has approved a wave of new housing-related laws, starting with Governor Brown's 2017, 15-bill "Legislative Housing Package" and continuing under Governor Newsom. These new laws generally fall into three main categories: funding and incentives, streamlining, and local accountability. While the legislation is intended to alleviate underlying issues related to housing, many new policies do not support their intended goals in Western Riverside County and similar inland regions, due to demographic and economic characteristics that distinguish these from more urbanized areas. WRCOG is committed to



working with State and federal leadership to identify solutions to the housing crisis that recognize the unique needs of different areas within California and help to address funding gaps, reduce regulatory barriers, and increase household incomes and ability to afford suitable housing.

In addition, with the demise of Redevelopment Agencies and State Enterprise Zones local governments experienced the loss of financing and incentive vehicles to attract and encourage private industry investment, build affordable housing and enhance infrastructure to promote economic vitality. WRCOG is committed to working with State and federal leadership to bolster economic growth and enhance the quality of life for its residents. In order to do this, WRCOG encourages that leaders at a variety of levels including business, policy and community development institutions will need to reimagine traditional economic development approaches and siloed efforts towards housing production and fostering economic resilience. A focus on equity through incentivizing place-based and strategic investments is necessary in order to scale collaboration and create an inclusive economy for shared prosperity in the subregion.

### **Action:**

- Support economic development as a driving factor in housing policy.
- Support legislation that supports regional and cross collaborative approaches to addressing and incentivizing the nexus between housing and economic development.
- Support an incentive-based effort to expedite the development of market-rate and affordable housing.
- Support collaborative efforts that involve the building industry, regulators, non-profits, and other parties to develop housing that is affordable to residents in Western Riverside County.
- Support legislation that would allocate funding to a housing trust in the WRCOG subregion.
- Oppose legislation that creates additional restrictions on local control of land use and development.
- Support legislation that provides ongoing State funding for mandated planning projects such as the Regional Housing Needs Assessment, Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), General Plan Housing Element updates, and other planning initiatives under AB 32 and SB 375.
- Support comprehensive reform to the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) process, involving collaboration with local jurisdictions, that better aligns housing development requirements with smart planning and funding availability.
- Support initiatives that further streamline the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements for projects included in approved housing elements.
- Support initiatives that provide funding to reduce homelessness, expand availability of permanent supportive and transitional housing, and coordinated re-entry services to assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness.
- Support legislation that would institute an equitable geographic distribution of State funding for housing.
- Oppose legislation that reduces State funding for local activities but still requires local governments to maintain existing service levels and responsibilities.
- Oppose legislation that calls for additional State and/or federal mandates absent funding.
- Oppose legislation that penalizes cities for not meeting State housing goals by threatening to withhold funding.



- Oppose legislation that would increase tariffs and regulatory barriers for construction materials like steel and wood.
- Support legislation that would establish a funding program to fill the void created by the elimination of redevelopment housing set-asides.
- Support legislation that supports the creation of living-wage jobs in the WRCOG subregion.
- Support legislation that encourages the creation of jobs near housing to improve the jobs-housing balance.
- Support legislation that incentivizes training for skilled and unskilled trades that work in the construction industry to reduce the cost of housing.

## **PLATFORM ISSUE AREAS**

### **1. General Advocacy**

The purpose of WRCOG is to unify Western Riverside County so that it can speak with a collective voice on issues of mutual concern that cross jurisdictional lines. The Agency operates with the goal of respecting local control while providing regional perspective. WRCOG supports efforts to maintain and increase local control, while enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of activities at the local level through regional, State, and federal planning and funding programs.

#### **Action:**

- Pursue State and federal funding to establish or enhance existing programs that promote quality of life and prosperity for Western Riverside County.
- Oppose legislation that seeks to limit local control or reduce funding opportunities to local jurisdictions.
- Coordinate advocacy efforts to promote the interests of Western Riverside County to decision makers at all levels of government.
- Support legislation that requires additional transparency and communication in State and federal legislative and commission activities.
- Support legislation that requires the Governor and the legislature to pass an on-time budget that does not rely on borrowing or taking from local governments.

### **2. Economic Development**

Western Riverside County is a subregion rich in diversity, resources, and labor. WRCOG is committed to supporting economic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 and ongoing economic resilience by establishing a common vision and brand identity for the subregion and enhancing the subregion's ability to attract new businesses and private investment thereby improving the overall quality of life for its residents.

#### **Action:**

- Support legislation that will assist businesses negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Collaborate with public and private sector stakeholders on policy and funding matters that enhance economic development and quality of life in Western Riverside County.



- Support legislation that encourages technology to assist jurisdictions and the education system in attracting potential businesses and educating future workers (e.g., wireless internet access).
- Support legislative action that streamlines the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process and modernizes CEQA law.
- Support legislation that would encourage employers to open satellite facilities for residents who work outside of Western Riverside County or commute long distances within the region for employment, implement telecommuting, and other transportation demand management strategies.
- Support legislation that expands marketability of the subregion and provides opportunities to “brand” Western Riverside County as a destination location and a desirable place to live, work, and play.
- Support legislation that facilitates collaboration between local government, education, and business.
- Oppose legislation that is harmful to the business climate in Western Riverside County.
- Support legislation that encourages the State of California to offer enhanced economic development tools to improve our competitiveness with other states.
- Support legislation that would maintain existing and/or allocate new grant funding for coordinated local and regional economic development efforts.
- Support legislation that would offer funding and assistance to enable jurisdictions to continue redevelopment activities.
- Oppose legislation that would encourage or incentivize businesses to leave Western Riverside County.
- Support legislation that would encourage graduates of local colleges and universities to stay in Western Riverside County.
- Support legislation that facilitates remittance of sales tax dollars on e-commerce purchases.
- Support legislation that recognizes the importance of economic development in helping to solve air quality, transportation and housing related issues within the region through the expansion and attraction of businesses and jobs.
- Support initiatives that spur entrepreneurship and facilitate the development of innovation business parks, incubators and other assets that encourage business growth, access to capital and mentorship in the subregion.
- Support economic development within existing and emerging industries that support a reduction in greenhouse gas and that incentivize development of local clean energy and greenhouse gas reduction technologies.

### **3. Education**

Education plays a pivotal role in the future of Western Riverside County. An educated workforce will attract a broader level of employers and increase the earning capabilities of residents. WRCOG is committed to expanding higher education and skilled labor training opportunities available to residents in Western Riverside County.

#### **Action:**

- Support legislation that would improve the quality of, and access to, education for all students.



- Support legislation that encourages public- private partnerships to increase the number of students who are college-ready, enroll and graduate from college, and who achieve degrees that are in demand in Western Riverside County.
- Support legislation that provides funding to retrain individuals for workforce re-entrance.
- Support the development of curriculum geared towards preparing students for sustainable “green collar” and clean technology jobs.
- Support legislation that would allow for the joint use of high school facilities for post-secondary education to expand access to, and enrollment in, college.
- Support legislation that facilitates access to career technical education to fill the growing need for skilled labor.
- Oppose legislation that redirects funding from the K-12 and post-secondary education system in Western Riverside County.

#### **4. Energy and Environment**

Energy conservation and efficiency can help residents, businesses, and jurisdictions save money, improve air quality, and protect the environment while meeting the demands of the growing population. WRCOG is committed to conserving natural resources and advancing alternative energy sources to promote the subregion’s ongoing sustainability.

##### **Action:**

- Support legislation that removes barriers for and provides funding to expand the WRCOG Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Programs.
- Support legislation that protect Community Choice Aggregator’s (CCA) right to develop and administer energy efficiency and integrated distributed energy resources.
- Support legislation that provides incentives for the private sector and local governments to voluntarily implement energy saving measures.
- Support legislation that support increased transparency into existing non-bypassable charges (NBC) and phase out unreasonable new charges.
- Protect indifference of all ratepayer to load migration between Load Serving entities (e.g. Utilities, CCAs, electric service providers).
- Support policy to sunset Power Charge Indifference Adjustment
  - Support policies to reform Investor owned utility procurement practices and minimize stranded investment to avoid stranded costs
  - Support reformation of the PCIA calculation process to promote transparency, accountability, and proper valuation of PCIA components.
- Oppose legislation and policies that threaten Community Choice Aggregation, local control of energy programs and resources, and the independence of the WRCOG and WCE Boards.
- Support legislation that establishes and preserves the role of local government in energy decisions, particularly for activities pertaining to electricity generation, energy storage, supply, demand, and conservation to ensure adequate supply and reasonable costs for residents and businesses.
- Support legislation that encourages or provides incentives for the production and use of clean alternative and renewable energy sources.
- Support legislation that encourages or provides incentives to pursue the goals outlined in the WRCOG Subregional Climate Action Plan, Resilient IE Toolkit, or individual member jurisdiction’s climate action plans.



- Support legislation that promotes municipal clean, alternative, and renewable energy generation and storage.
- Support legislation that encourages / promotes local governments to be program administrators for electrification transportation programs.
- Support legislation that encourages local governments to support / expand smart city infrastructure.
- Monitor current / future legislation on building electrification, Zero Net Energy (ZNE), Reach Codes and Codes Compliance for the building community.
- Support legislation that encourages emissions reductions from sources under federal control (e.g., caused by planes, trains, and ships) and increased emissions monitoring methods.
- Support the continuation of air quality management at the air basin level rather than at the statewide or individual county level.
- Support legislation that extends federal alternative fuel and vehicle tax credits and incentives.
- Support legislation that would encourage the development of alternative fuel facilities.
- Support legislation that encourages the expansion of solid waste conversion technologies.
- Support legislation that increases markets for recyclable or compostable materials.
- Support legislation that enables efficient recycling of organic material.
- Support legislation that implements programs to reduce litter and illegal dumping.
- Support the increase of fines and/or confiscation of vehicles for individuals and companies caught in the act of illegal dumping.
- Support State loans, grants, and loan guarantees for businesses implementing source reduction programs and utilizing post-consumer recycled materials in the manufacture of new products.
- Support legislation that encourages the proper disposal of hazardous waste.
- Support legislation that implements Extended Producer Responsibility principles aimed at removing the cost burden for disposal of products from local jurisdictions and agencies.
- Oppose waste management requirements that would put local jurisdictions at risk of not meeting AB 939 requirements, or make local jurisdictions incur excessive costs absent funding.

### 5. Health

Health outcomes strongly influence quality of life. Riverside County ranks 35th out of 58 ranked counties in the state for health factors influencing health outcomes, due to such issues as a lack of access to clinical care (e.g., health care facilities, insurance, and practitioners), social and economic conditions (e.g., income, education, jobs, and safety), and environmental quality (e.g., park access and air quality). WRCOG supports efforts to foster a natural, social, and economic environment conducive to health and empower the subregion to address existing challenges in a collaborative, sustainable manor.

#### Action:

- Support legislation that reduces state regulatory barriers that impede the provision of health services in Western Riverside County.



- Support legislation that facilitates regional collaboration in addressing health and healthcare problems.
- Support legislation aimed at increasing institutions that offer training and residency opportunities for healthcare professionals in exchange for contractual services.
- Support legislative that fosters incentives for health care professionals to practice in underserved areas, including Western Riverside County.
- Support legislation aimed at increasing the number of hospital beds in the region.
- Support legislation that increases local government authority to oversee location of community care facilities and transportation options to the care facilities.
- Oppose legislation that could potentially establish unnecessary barriers to the creation and construction of healthcare facilities.
- Support legislation that supports continued financing of the University of California, Riverside School of Medicine to attract and retain healthcare professionals in the region.
  
- Support legislation that provides funding and other assistance for the development of a Youth Master Plan that contains plans and programs for children with special needs (i.e. parks, recreational needs, and housing opportunities for children with special needs).
- Support legislation that creates an information exchange, or information network, where residents can access available support services and data on specific issues.
- Support legislation that facilitates Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHDP) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) streamlining for efficient hospital construction.
- Support legislation that promotes the development of walkable communities.
- Support legislation that coordinates health goals with economic development actions.
- Support legislation that seeks to improve the level of physical activity among adults and children.
- Support legislation that seeks to improve access to affordable, healthy foods.

## 6. Transportation

In order to meet the needs of Western Riverside County's current population and sustainably accommodate future growth, the subregion must expand the capacity and efficiency of its transportation network. WRCOG is committed to supporting efforts to optimize quality, safety, and accessibility of transportation infrastructure for motorists, goods movement, transit, and non-motorized transportation.

### Action:

- Support federal and State efforts to provide sustainable and stable funding for the transportation system.
- Support efforts to ensure that communities in Western Riverside County receive fair and equitable allocations of transportation funding from the federal, State, and regional level.
- Support legislation that gives priority to self-help and "super" self-help counties when allocating funding for transportation.
- Support legislation and funding mechanisms that support and encourage the use of transit and non-motorized transportation, including active transportation.
- Support legislation that enhances the safety of city streets and arterials for vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic.



- Support regional transportation programs.
- Support legislation that provides funding for goods movement-related projects and studies.
- Support legislation that would create funding opportunities for upgrades and/or separations for at-grade crossings.
- Support legislation that increases local flexibility in the allocation of transportation capital funds.
- Oppose legislation that caps or limits the ability to impose development fees.
- Oppose legislation that eliminates or restricts the use of Riverside County State Transportation Improvement Funds, federal transportation funding, Measure A, SB 1, or toll funding for local transportation projects.
- Support increased funding for transportation projects selected based on regional performance metrics.
- Support financial incentives for the use of zero-emission vehicles.
- Support efforts to encourage transit-oriented development.
- Support efforts to ensure the implementation of Senate Bill 743 (SB 743) and Vehicle Miles Traveled as an agency's transportation impact metric is further refined to create certainty and oppose policies that restrict the ability to deliver goods movement enhancements due to the application of SB 743.
- Support equitable distribution of transportation funding to ensure that disadvantaged communities receive their fair share of funding
- Engage in policy discussions that utilize teleworking as a method to reduce traffic congestion and improve local economic and public health by permanently increasing the number of Riverside County residents who telecommute or work remotely. Support a greater share of state greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction funds toward transportation investments to address the transportation sector's share of GHG emissions.
- Support the simplification of SB 743 VMT modeling and analysis for capacity increasing highway projects.
- Support efforts that allow transportation agencies to receive retroactive credit for VMT reducing projects that have been recently delivered or are planned in their delivery plans.
- Support efforts or initiatives that limit the liability of transportation projects for long-term conservation or mitigation.
- Support efforts to increase the number of highway related improvements that qualify for Categorical Exclusions and Exemptions while remaining sensitive to environmental impacts.

### **7. Water**

Western Riverside County's economic well-being and quality of life depend on securing a reliable supply of water to meet the existing and future demands of the subregion. WRCOG supports continued conservation efforts that work to reduce water use, strengthen and improve the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta levees and ecosystem, and support the identification and construction of alternative means for conveying water to Southern California residents and businesses.



### **Action:**

- Support legislation and legislative actions that promote the development of alternative water resources such as recycled water, storm water reclamation, and groundwater desalination.
- Support efforts that preserve local control in addressing and mitigating the impacts of drought.
- Support legislation that explores new water storage methods.
- Support legislation that provides funding to local governments for water quality and conservation-related programs.
- Support legislation to improve the state's water infrastructure and delivery mechanisms without causing excessive financial burdens or delivery delays to Southern California.
- Oppose legislation that would delay implementation of the California WaterFix and California EcoRestore.
- Oppose legislation that shifts or re-aligns local ad valorem property tax revenues approved by local voters for vital water and wastewater infrastructure.