

Agenda Item Number

Regional Voice

Presenter: George Kloeppel

Action Recommended: Approve; Provide Direction to Staff

Background:

As part of the Climate of Prosperity project and the discussions of the Communications Subcommittee, it has been recommended that LCOG nurture a stronger relationship with the Lane County legislative delegation. Specifically, a regional position on a small number of legislative issues was considered appropriate. In addition, the members of the delegation are scheduled to attend the September meeting of the Board to hear the issues and concerns of Board members and to report on their expectations and priorities for the 2011 Session.

The Regional Voice can be an effective and valuable tool for our membership. But two of factors need to be borne in mind: First, LCOG's strength lies in its diverse membership. When a legislative position can be endorsed by the entire membership, a powerful statement can be made. However, LCOG's diversity also limits the number of issues which can garner such broad support. Hence, the Board will need to approach this advocacy endeavor carefully and avoid working at cross purposes with our own membership. Second, the legislative process is a dynamic enterprise with changes and compromises made along the way. Ideally, a Regional Voice should be responsive to this pattern of change. But, realistically, there will not be opportunity to obtain the consent of the membership when amendments are offered to bills in committee. Consequently, LCOG's positions on legislative issues will have to be at a high policy level and thematic in nature.

Several positions are listed below for the Board's consideration. With Board approval secured, a list of Regional Voice positions can be communicated to our delegation in advance of the Session. Further, the larger member jurisdictions that have intergovernmental relations staff members following the legislative process will be able to utilize the agreed-upon COG positions to make their points in Salem during the Session. Similarly, the Board's approval of a Regional Voice position

will give staff and policy officials license to speak on behalf of the adopted positions. But as legislative concepts and bills morph and change, the Regional Voice positions will be less meaningful—and less useful as a tool for our staff and the IGR staff members representing Eugene, Springfield, Lane County, and the larger educational jurisdictions and special districts.

Clearly, funding will be the issue for the 2011 Session. While perhaps always the case to some degree, the recession-driven fiscal challenges of the moment are likely to focus the legislative policy making on fiscal issues. LCOG can not take positions that pit the interests of one type of member against those of another type—schools vs. cities, for example. However, the Regional Voice can proclaim local governments’ opposition to the imposition of “unfunded mandates;” it can urge the state to refrain from taking away current revenues or imposing additional costs; and it can press for maximum flexibility for local decision makers with respect to revenue generation and local public policy formation.

COG staff is indebted to Brenda Wilson, Eugene’s Intergovernmental Relations Manager, for her assistance in compiling much of the representative listing that follows. When the Session is underway, she and Alex Cuyler, who holds the parallel position in Lane County, and other IGR staff members from member jurisdictions, will have the ammunition of LCOG’s Regional Voice positions to work with. As in the past, Brenda and Alex will cooperate with each other on behalf of their jurisdictions whenever possible; and they will, of course, take opposing positions on measures when warranted. An example of the latter situation will be with the proposal to allow counties to charge cities a fee for including items on an election ballot. Because such a measure would undoubtedly elicit different positions among COG members, it would not be a good candidate for the Regional Voice program. Eugene’s advocacy position is reflected in some of the following concepts.

Legislative Concepts Likely to Come Before the 2011 Regular Session

Funding Equity for “Transfer AAAs.” This concept has been raised in previous Sessions, either as a Policy Option Package (POP) or as a bill introduced by a member. It would require the State DHS to support Transfer Area Agencies on Aging (such as LCOG) at the same level as is provided for the Department’s administration of the same services. Even support at the 95 percent level would be a substantial improvement. **SUPPORT**

Funding for Oregon Project Independence. Budgetary support for this General Fund-supported program is vulnerable, and yet OPI has proven itself to be cost-effective, maximizing the independence of senior clients at a fraction of the public expense that would later be incurred on behalf of the same client in a more restrictive, Medicaid-supported care environment. **SUPPORT**

Bail Bond Companies. This concept would bring back to Oregon bail bond companies, businesses that front bail to persons that have been arrested and lodged in jail for a fee. (Oregon kicked them out in the 1970's). Eugene and most cities would **OPPOSE**.

Business Energy Tax Credit (BETC). While it is not clear where this concept will end up, the BETC expires in 2012 and that would include the pass-through which many cities utilize. There has been talk about eliminating the pass-through. Eugene and most cities would **OPPOSE**.

Drug Take-back Program. This concept would set up either a statewide (preferred) or pilot program for the disposal of over-the-counter and prescription drugs. Eugene and most cities would **SUPPORT**.

Reduction of PERS 6 Percent Member Contribution. The Governor's Reset Cabinet recently released its report, which was intended to inform the Governor's 2011-2013 Recommended State Budget. One of the Cabinet's recommendations is to reduce the PERS IAP member contribution to 3 percent or less and to give consideration to giving employees the difference in salary and perhaps allowing some choice for employees to redirect those amounts into a Deferred Comp program. Eugene and most cities would **SUPPORT**.

Repeal of PERS Benefit Validation Provisions. This concept would repeal SB 897 (2009) which prohibits PERS from correcting a member's retirement benefit after a validation has been conducted even if the benefit calculation is incorrect or based on incorrect information. Eugene and most cities would **SUPPORT**.

Revision of Local Option Levy. This concept would permit local governments to have local option levies for more than 10 years (15? 20?) and take them outside compression. Eugene and most cities would **SUPPORT**.

Pre-Paid Cell Phone Tax collection for 9-1-1 fee. This concept would require pre-paid cell phone companies to collect and remit the \$0.75 fee for 9-1-1. Eugene and most cities would **SUPPORT**.

Local Option Tobacco Tax. This concept would allow local governments to independently impose their own taxes on tobacco products. Eugene and most cities would **SUPPORT**.

Property Tax System Overhaul. This would be a multi-session discussion to bring about an overhaul of the current state property tax system. Eugene and most cities would **SUPPORT**.

Liquor License Limits. This concept would permit a city to set a maximum number of licenses that would be available in that city. Most smaller cities would **SUPPORT**; Eugene would be **NEUTRAL** or would **SUPPORT** on basis of local control.

Your review of these legislative concepts and potential positions is urged, Under this agenda item, the issues can be vetted. If Board members are uncomfortable with any of the recommended positions, those should be pulled from the list for further discussion in December. But those recommended positions that have passed the Board's review will be available—as a preliminary listing—for communication to the Lane County delegation after this month's meeting.

The Board is asked to review the list, and approve its content, as appropriate.