



Association of
Minnesota Counties

LEGISLATIVE POLICY PRIORITIES

Adopted by AMC Board 12/03/2017

2018

PRIORITIES

Land Acquisitions

Background: Counties throughout the state have different philosophies relating to public lands and acquisitions of private land for public purposes. Some counties would like more public land within their borders, citing tourism and other positive economic opportunities and benefits associated with public lands. Other counties are concerned with the opposite – that lands where an economic value was once derived will now be taken off the property tax rolls, and will have further trickle-down effects on main street businesses and the overall economy in their local communities.

Under current law, some DNR acquisitions of private land for conservation purposes require county board approval. However, if a nongovernmental organization purchases a parcel in private ownership with state funds and gifts it to the state or federal government, they do not need to go through the same approval process with the county board. This inconsistency has led to confusion and concern for some county boards who oftentimes do not know this type of transaction is occurring until the property is gifted to the state or federal government.

Solution: While counties may differ on their views of the costs and benefits of public lands, they do agree that improved communication is a simple, positive step to be taken that will help not only a county's ability to plan for current and future land use and tax base changes, but will also help create positive and supported public land projects in local communities. Communication early in the land acquisition process will help facilitate win-win situations for all stakeholders involved.

AMC supports requiring that county boards be notified of, and allowed to comment on, applications for state-funded acquisition projects that are proposed in the county.



AMC supports legislation that would require a field test of periodic data matching before full scale implementation to ensure functionality of the technology system.

Minnesota Eligibility Technology System (METS) Field Test

Background: Today, nearly one million Minnesotans are enrolled in Medical Assistance (MA) or MinnesotaCare. Counties are responsible for determining eligibility for these programs. The Minnesota Technology Eligibility System was intended to automate and streamline the application process so that counties would be ready to respond to the increased volume resulting from MA expansion. This system has proven to be technologically inefficient, requiring counties to invest in increased staff time to complete basic eligibility determination tasks. In 2015, the Legislature passed legislation requiring Periodic Data Matching, which would randomly sample those receiving MA to determine if they are still eligible. Counties are concerned that METS is not ready to implement this new requirement by the March, 2018 deadline.

Solution: AMC supports legislation that would require field testing of Periodic Data Matching at the county level before it is rolled out statewide. Further, AMC supports legislation that requires field testing of any new technology system used by counties prior to statewide implementation.

AMC supports bonding proposals that strengthen the mental health continuum of care through regional crisis centers to provide stabilization services, and the creation of additional supportive housing options.

Mental Health Regional Crisis Centers and Supportive Housing

Background: Mental health issues continue to be challenging to counties. There are multiple areas within the mental health continuum of care for which additional resources should be allocated. The crisis center approach would reduce the number of people in mental health crisis that are brought to jails and emergency rooms as a last resort, by providing short term stabilizations services, beds and psychiatric care. Capital investment for supportive housing would create additional opportunities for moving individuals out of the Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center in a timelier manner. This will result in individuals being placed in appropriate settings in the community and will reduce the cost share pressure on county budgets.

Solution: There are proposals, proactively developed by counties, at the legislature to use funds from bonding for mental health infrastructure to enhance the mental health continuum of care.



Opioids

Background: Use of opioids and the overdose deaths as a result have seen a sharp uptick in the last few years. In addition to the loss of life that comes with the influx of overdoses, the opioid epidemic has taxed many county-operated systems including jails, the courts, probation, child protection, chemical dependency treatment, and others. This is an issue that is rightfully on the forefront in many counties across Minnesota, as demonstrated by the significant number of counties that are participating in the litigation with opioid manufacturers.

Solution: In addition to potential financial resources for prevention and treatment, this issue also offers the potential for policy changes that do not require additional funding. Priorities include assuring that any efforts to spend resources on combatting the opioid epidemic include counties and resources be shared with county partners. This would also include a review and potential changes to statute to allow for all types of first responders to carry and administer Narcan (Naloxone) and to be sure that any county employee with regular contact with a high-risk population have liability protection for administering Narcan.

AMC supports providing the resources necessary to improve the public safety response to the opioid epidemic.

Broadband Development Funding

Background: Access to broadband (Internet connections that can transfer data and information at high speeds) is disparate throughout Minnesota, especially in Greater Minnesota where it's less accessible for households and businesses. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) has been working to bring access to broadband across the state. DEED's Office of Broadband Development is charged with the goal of border-to-border high speed Internet access throughout Minnesota. The Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program allocates public dollars to areas of Minnesota that are unserved or underserved. The legislature approved \$20 million for the grant program in 2017; 70 applicants submitted requests totaling over \$50 million during the grant cycle.

Solution: AMC supports the Rural Broadband Coalition in asking the legislature for \$51.48 million in 2018. This funding will help level the playing field for all Minnesotans regardless of where they live (urban, suburban or rural) and expand opportunities for healthcare, education and jobs. It also reflects actual need based on 2017 requests.

AMC supports the build-out of broadband infrastructure in Minnesota, including legislation that would provide continued funding for the Border-to- Border Broadband Development Grant Program.

Transportation Funding

Background: The Legislature passed a comprehensive transportation funding bill last session, which included general fund revenue shifts from the sales tax on auto parts, general obligation bonding money, and transfer of the entire amount of the Motor Vehicle Lease Sales Tax (MVLST) to transportation. The bill included \$235 million in new revenue for roads and bridges and an additional \$71 million in general fund dollars for Metropolitan Area Transit. It did not include a substantial increase in funding from any constitutionally dedicated sources.

Last year's bonding bill included funding for the Local Road Improvement Program and the Local Bridge Replacement Program, though funding for each was almost entirely earmarked for specific projects.

Despite last year's transportation and bonding initiatives, most counties are still facing millions of dollars in shortfall to provide basic maintenance of current roads, bridges and transit services.

Solution: AMC supports a robust bonding bill in 2018 that adequately funds the local road and bridge programs, as well as the Local Road Wetland Replacement Program. Additionally, AMC advocates for a long-term funding solution that is comprehensive (multi-modal), balanced (regionally and between modes), sustainable (on-going funding), and dedicated (constitutionally for roads and statutorily for transit.)

AMC supports continued comprehensive transportation funding that includes new revenue for roads, bridges, and transit.



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