

Roadmap to Prosperity

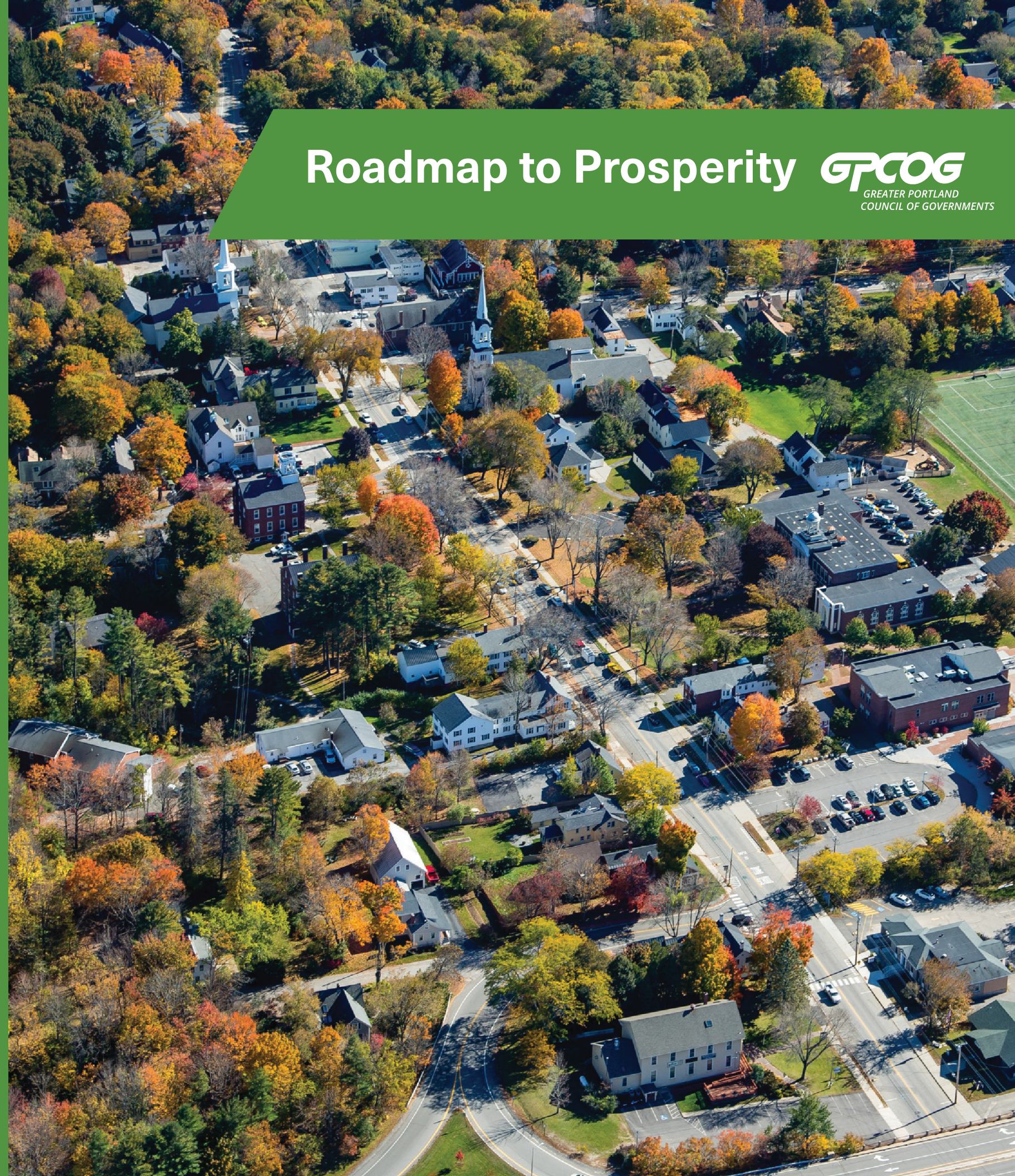


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Dear Governor, Senators, and Representatives,

We – the cities and towns of Greater Portland - are committed to **reducing taxes, building for the future** and providing **security and prosperity** to everyone.

Almost 50 years ago, the organization that helps us do these things, the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG), was created by the Maine legislature. We are proud to be part of GPCOG, which helps:

- **municipalities work together to accomplish the things that they could not achieve on their own,**
- **prioritize the uses of over \$20 million dollars a year in federal and state transportation and transit spending** in the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System, and
- **implement an economic strategy for our region and partner with federal agencies to bring resources to our region to grow our economy.**

GPCOG **convenes** our region. GPCOG **catalyzes** action. And GPCOG is a **conduit** for ideas, energy and resources.

Through GPCOG, the cities and towns of this region are uniquely positioned to share our collective policy priorities for the next administration and the next legislature.

The Regional Voice Committee, which is composed of elected officials from GPCOG's member cities and towns, has worked with leaders from around the region to put together **a roadmap for how state government can help our region reach its full potential.**

Our region is fortunate to be at the center of Maine's economy in 2018. We enjoy many advantages that other parts of Maine should share in, like expanding employment and new residents. At the same time, all of the region's communities face serious challenges, and even in southern Maine, parts of our region are struggling on many levels. We know that the entire state's economic future is linked to our region, from exports to innovation. **Progress in our region is deeply tied to progress for all of Maine.**

So how can the next Governor and the new Legislature help us meet **our commitment to growing prosperity for everyone in our region?** What policies and investments will help us meet our challenges, and forge new opportunities?

In the following pages we've got some good ideas to share. And in every instance we offer our ideas in the spirit of collaboration, compromise and community. We hope you'll receive them in the same spirit and work with us to make our region, and our state, a better place for everyone who calls it home.



On behalf of the Regional Voice Committee, and the entire Greater Portland Council of Government network, we look forward to achieving our vision together with everyone who shares our passion for our region.

Regional Voice Committee Members

Beth Edmonds, Chair
Pious Ali, Portland
Jean-Marie Catarina, Scarborough
Kim Cook, Portland
Dan Coyne, United Way
Mary Fernandes, Casco
Brian Libby, Standish
Bruce Foshay, Windham
Claude Morgan, South Portland
Belinda Ray, Portland
Doug Reighley, Freeport
Ed Suslovic, USM
Ron Shepard, Gorham
William Whitten, North Yarmouth
Glenn Zaidman, Bridgton

GPCOG Executive Committee Members

Jerre Bryant, Westbrook, President
Belinda Ray, Portland, Vice Chair
Linda Cohen, South Portland
Mary Fernandes, Casco
Stephen Gordon, Cumberland County
Peter Joseph, Freeport
Marla Stelk, Gorham
Matthew Sturgis, Cape Elizabeth
Nat Tupper, Yarmouth

A Roadmap to Prosperity



The road to greater prosperity for everyone in our region lies ahead of us. Together, regional groups like GPCOG and state government can get there together by forging a new relationship that:

- Creates regional solutions which reduce taxes
- Builds infrastructure for the future
- Builds transportation for the future
- Provides security and prosperity for everyone in our community, and
- Renews the state-local partnership

Our roadmap has five steps:

- 1.** The road begins with creating **regional solutions** that will save money, leverage action across municipal boundaries, and produce more efficient, effective results;
- 2.** It travels through **new state investments** in broadband, wastewater and storm water infrastructure, all essential elements in supporting the growth of prosperity;
- 3.** It prioritizes **investments in our transportation systems** to meet the 21st century's challenges and opportunities;
- 4.** It ensures that everyone in our communities, and **particularly those of us who are most in need of support**, are a part of the journey, and;
- 5.** It concludes with a **new era of state-local partnership** which supports regional solutions to all the problems that our municipalities cannot solve on their own.

This issues briefing paper is intended to help the next Governor and the next legislature understand what municipalities do, how they can do better by working together through regional strategies, and how state government is a critical partner in making that happen.

Regionalism is non-partisan. It's not a political strategy. It's a policy choice that solves difficult problems by empowering local government to act together.

Regionalism saves money, improves effectiveness and efficiency, and brings us together so we can shape our future. Regional solutions make tax reductions possible, they put building for the future within our grasp, and they enable us to extend security and prosperity to everyone in our community.

We hope you'll join us on this journey by supporting regional policies and everything they can do for all of Maine, turning our most difficult problems into our greatest opportunities by working together.

With your support we can help everyone travel the road to greater prosperity together.

Every roadmap has a beginning, middle and an end. If our destination is greater prosperity for everyone, the road starts with creating regional solutions.

In plain words, towns can't do it all alone. They need help, and that's where our road begins by looking to regional action that makes lower taxes, investments in the future and better lives for everyone possible.

1 CREATING REGIONAL SOLUTIONS THAT REDUCE TAXES

Our member cities and towns are good at working together, but they often need more help than we can provide. Organizations like GPCOG help, but that's only a small fraction of what's needed to create regional opportunities to lower taxes, invest in growth and improve peoples' lives.

Regional action is cost efficient – it saves tax dollars. It's effective as a way to get us all pulling in the same direction. And it's necessary to take on issues that are bigger than local town lines. But too often our ability to act regionally is limited by scarce funding.



State government can help by recognizing the importance of regional organizations and funding their work to take on the really hard issues, like regional job creation and retention, like providing more effective and efficient services, and like supporting older adults and caring for everyone in our communities.

Here are some specific ideas to help regional groups like ours do more for our communities:

A. Expand funding for the Local Efficiency Fund, and expand the Fund's purposes from just property tax saving to also include more effective and efficient delivery of services.

B. Fund regional support for action in every part of the state, and target funding to progress on our most pressing priorities, like workforce attraction and housing, improved public transportation, and better environmental protection at the local and regional level.

C. Support economic and environmental resiliency by prioritizing state policies that help communities look ahead to economic and natural disruptions and plan for them before they happen.

D. Protect the outdoors and its heritage by funding regional technical assistance programs for local Planning Boards and Code Enforcement Officers so that our local citizens can be more effective stewards of our environment.

Regional approaches save tax dollars, pull together communities across local boundaries and help us think big. GPCOG is just one of many councils of government in Maine that can get great results if state government supports our work. We hope you will.

2 BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: INFRASTRUCTURE

Most people today agree that our top problem is an aging, shrinking work force. We need more people to join our economy. But where will they live? How will they get to work? And who will help pay for the investments we need to make to support their arrival? Only regional strategies can successfully answer these essential questions.

We have a lot of data describing our region. Close to Portland we see enough growth to produce serious housing affordability and traffic congestion problems, but even as the economy thrives, many people are lagging behind.

Not 25 miles away the economy is far less robust, with communities losing population and jobs, and struggling to understand their future.

Both sets of problems have a common set of solutions. Here are some ideas for state government action that can unlock new investments in growth, and shape that growth in ways that won't wreck the things we love most about our region and our state.

A. Empower local governments to help address the affordable work force housing crisis confronting us all, not with state mandates, but rather with new policies that incent regional approaches to increasing housing density, extending supporting transit, and connecting neighboring communities together as they help the private sector create the housing that we need to attract the workers and families we must have to sustain ourselves.

B. Commit state bonding authority to making critical infrastructure investments, particularly in broadband, wastewater and storm water systems. These infrastructures are essential to sustaining

new growth, especially in parts of our region where growth is lagging.

C. Take all necessary steps to ensure the development of a cold storage facility at the Port of Portland to support greater export capacity for Maine's entire food economy.

D. Provide new data-driven investment policies for municipalities and sub-regions that are not experiencing growth to enable every community to compete for new jobs and become a part of our future economy.



Whether it's incentivizing affordable housing, or supporting the critical infrastructure investments that we must make to move forward, state government has a crucial role to help every municipality participate in the future economy.

If state government supports regional solutions, and then invests in building for the future, we will be well down the road toward greater prosperity for everyone. But before we travel further we need to talk about transportation.

Our transportation system is the most important infrastructure in our region, from roads and bridges to airports, rail, bus and ferry services. Moving people and goods sustains our communities and enables growth. So our roadmap to prosperity for everyone demands that we invest in...

3 BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: TRANSPORTATION

Our region's transportation system is central to building our communities' future. Economic growth, social equity and livable communities all depend on good transportation. To do that we need to do three things:

Sustain and maintain what we have, recognizing that our transportation system faces significant maintenance deficits that must be addressed.

Invest in a changing future, meeting challenges from autonomous vehicles to growing our population without growing our transportation bottlenecks.

Expand access to new economic and educational opportunities for everyone, and especially for those who are economically or otherwise disadvantaged.



To meet those goals we need a transportation system that is well maintained, full of choices and integrated. Here are some specific things that state government can do to partner with our region in order to make sure we remain on the road to greater prosperity for everyone:

A. Take all steps necessary to attract large-scale federal funding for transformational regional transportation investments. PACTS is developing a list of potential projects – coordinating state resources will maximize our chances for success.

B. Provide expanded state funding for the region's existing transportation infrastructure, leveraging every other available source of supportive funding, to maintain what we have and keep our foundation strong.

C. Create incentives through policies and new funding to support regional public transit improvements, including integrated fare systems, unified scheduling, better public promotion and optimized service delivery to grow ridership.

D. Increase state support of regional mobility management and active transportation initiatives which serve rural and disadvantaged populations throughout our region.

Transportation infrastructure is the backbone of our economy, our communities and our future. With transportation leading the way, the road to prosperity for everyone opens up.

“Everyone” means everyone. Our road map to greater prosperity must include...

4 SECURITY AND PROSPERITY FOR EVERYONE

Caring for all our neighbors is something every municipality in our region does every day. From food and heating assistance to housing and health care, municipal government is a key part of the social safety net.

Creating stronger partnerships with state government will help our communities provide better support to everyone who needs help. Once again, regional strategies can be the key to success.

Here are some specific things that state government can do to help the communities in our region improve the lives of all our residents:

A. Support Housing First, a proven best practice that saves money, ends homelessness for chronically homeless people and saves lives. Housing First works in our region, and is spreading, but requires strong financial support for operations and for new housing projects.

B. Support Thrive 2027, our region's Collective Impact plan to mobilize the entire region to help create financial stability, improve educational outcomes for our disadvantaged populations, and improve public health. State policies supporting these outcomes are critical to our success.

C. Provide continued and expanded support for the recommendations of the State Opioids Task Force, particularly in the areas of prevention, treatment and de-stigmatization.

D. Expand the supports provided to aging in place, including regional mobility management solutions, affordable housing policies and targeted health care supports. Our older adult population is a resource and key part of our community – state partnerships with local government can enhance our older adults' lives and their contributions to our future.

In all these cases, and more, regional approaches are an excellent way to educate, strategize and act in an efficient, effective way. Our organization and many others across Maine are positioned to connect local governments together with the best ways to support everyone in our communities.



What's too often missing is state government support – the policies, funding and expertise necessary to make sure everyone in our region is included on the road to greater prosperity.

By focusing on regional approaches to helping every person in our communities, state government can be our most effective partner in assuring that when we say 'greater prosperity for everyone,' we actually include everyone.

Our partners at the Maine Municipal Association make a powerful case for rebuilding the state-local partnership in their 2018 Municipal Issues Paper.

We urge everyone to read the MMA paper for a better understanding of what municipal government does for our citizens, how that work is paid for, and what the community level impacts of recent state funding reductions have been on municipal services, K-12 education, county services and all local property tax payers.

5 LOWER PROPERTY TAXES BY RENEWING THE STATE-LOCAL PARTNERSHIP

In our conversations at the regional level we've heard loud and clear the need to return state funding for local and regional services back to the levels historically promised.

Municipalities and their property tax payers are responsible for a long list of essential services, including local education, road maintenance, land use regulation, building code enforcement, environmental protection (especially water quality), economic development, provision for the poor, waste management and the conduct of elections.

And our counties also increasingly rely on the property tax to fund jails and the many services needed by inmates, along with running our registries of deeds and our County Sherriff's departments, among many other things.

We agree that a healthy state-local partnership requires renewed state funding for everything that municipal and county government do for our communities. Here are some specific things that state government can do to renew the partnership and support critical municipal and county services:

A. Restore funding to historically promised levels by: providing 55% of K-12 education funding; returning municipal Revenue Sharing back to 5% of state income and sales tax revenues; maintaining municipal Homestead Exemption reimbursement at 62.5% to restore lost property taxes; and providing Counties the necessary funding to operate County jails.

B. Explore all the avenues for new municipal revenue streams. Local or regional option sales taxes are common across the country, and serve to offset the costs incurred by municipal service centers. Other more creative options are also common. Commitment to expanding municipal revenues in support of the services our communities provide should be a long term goal.

C. Lower property taxes through a variety of strategies including: voluntary regionalization, collective service delivery, improved efficiencies and new technologies. Combined with the other strategies outlined in this section, and given state government support, sustainable property tax levels can be in reach for all our municipalities.

Our region is no different than the rest of Maine. Local officials work hard to manage scarce resources and do the most they can for their communities. With the state's recommitment to strongly supporting that work we can continue down the road to greater prosperity for everyone.

Conclusion

The 129th Maine Legislature will convene in early January of 2019. Maine's next Governor will be sworn in at the same time. Together lawmakers and the next Governor have the chance to shape our region, and the entire State, for years to come.

As our municipal members look ahead to the future they see great opportunities, and great challenges. They believe that great success can be achieved if we work together at the regional level, with state government as a strong partner.

This paper proposes many specific steps that state government can take to advance cost effective, efficient regional approaches to the numerous issues that municipalities must confront, but cannot overcome on their own.

Working together our region can accomplish much, and with strong state support our capacity to shape a more prosperous future for everyone in our region is within reach.

In 2019 we hope lawmakers and the next Governor will join us in efforts that:

- Create regional solutions that reduce taxes
- Build infrastructure for the future
- Build transportation for the future
- Provide security and prosperity for everyone in our community, and
- Renew the state-local partnership

If we can follow that roadmap together, we can advance greater prosperity for everyone throughout our region, and throughout Maine.

We invite you to join us on the journey.

