

2024 Federal Policy Agenda

Mid-America Regional Council

About MARC

The Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) is the association of city and county governments and Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) serving the bi-state Kansas City region, including Cass, Clay, Jackson, Platte and Ray counties in Missouri; and Johnson, Leavenworth, Miami and Wyandotte counties in Kansas. MARC brings local officials, nonprofit organizations, economic development organizations and other groups together to address an efficient and equitable transportation system; a healthy environment; support for vulnerable older adults; a strong early learning system for families and the economy; a competitive economy; safe, secure and healthy communities; affordable housing to meet a range of needs and efficient local government services.

About this policy platform

This policy platform represents a consensus of policy positions and priorities of the Kansas City region as discussed and discerned in various committees, working groups and public engagement forums supported by MARC. The platform is approved by the elected leaders comprising the MARC Board of Directors as a statement of regional consensus and does not necessarily reflect the views of individual members of the board.

Regional councils have the unique ability to efficiently coordinate and plan across jurisdictional boundaries. The federal government uses regional councils and metropolitan planning organizations like MARC to distribute and expend federal funds to achieve regional goals.

Members of Congress are encouraged to consider the critical needs in the Kansas City region as they deliberate policy issues and appropriate funds for these priority areas of concern in FY2024:

FY2024 budget and program reauthorizations

The president signed a second continuing resolution on Nov. 17, 2023, with two expiration dates for appropriation bills:

- Jan. 19, 2024, for Agriculture, Energy-Water, Military Construction – VA, and Transportation-HUD.
- Feb. 2, 2024, for Commerce-Justice-Science, Defense, Financial Services, General Government, Homeland Security, Interior-Environment, Labor-HHS-Education Legislative Branch and State-Foreign Operations.

Key policy position: Encourage Congress to adopt a federal budget that allows for certainty of federal resources to support authorized programs.

Transportation

The Kansas City region has an extensive network of highway, bridge and roadway infrastructure and an expanding network of facilities for other modes of transportation. The region supports investing in the safety and integrity of current systems; expanded multi-modal transportation, particularly public transit, to support travel to jobs in suburban locations; active transportation to meet both travel and health needs of an expanding population; and freight infrastructure to support a growing logistics industry.

Key policy positions: Encourage Congress to support legislation and appropriations that allow for:

- Safe and efficient transportation with appropriate and strategic consideration to regional economic and mobility needs and priorities. Funding is needed for all modes of transportation, including public transit and active transportation. Congress has authorized considerable resources through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act for transportation infrastructure. Beyond this special legislation, sustainable and innovative investment solutions to fully fund the Highway Trust Fund through multiple appropriate revenue sources are critical to protect and preserve our transportation system.
- Reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration to fund maintenance and improvements at the Kansas City International Airport and general aviation airports around the region.
- Continued efforts to reduce freight and passenger train bottlenecks throughout the nation, including support for the national rail passenger network and operation of the Southwest Chief Amtrak route, the Missouri River Runner and the proposed Heartland Flyer.
- Expanded funding and access to expertise for planning, designing and building policy and infrastructure frameworks to cope with likely changes induced by the expanding use of connected and autonomous vehicles.

Climate change and adaptation

The Kansas City region is confronted with a variety of risks and vulnerabilities from climate change, including flooding, drought and extreme heat. In March 2021, the MARC Board of Directors adopted the Kansas City Regional Climate Action Plan to lead and support a coordinated, equity-centered effort among local governments, institutions and others to build climate resilience throughout the region. The focus of the regional plan comports with the goals of proposed federal efforts to comprehensively address climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience initiatives tied to energy efficiency, renewable energy, public and active transportation, fleet electrification, resilient infrastructure improvements, sustainable agriculture and food systems, integrated watershed management, innovation and finance, urban heat mitigation and green infrastructure. MARC is engaging the community on a Priority Climate Action Plan and Implementation Grant in response to U.S

Environmental Protection Agency resource opportunities to reduce carbon emissions with a priority on equity for those most impacted by climate change.

Key policy positions: MARC supports comprehensive federal policies and investments to mitigate or respond to climate change and encourage coordination across federal agencies and departments. The region's Congressional delegation is urged to support MARC's regional Priority Climate Action Plan and Implementation Grant.

Environment

Key policy position: Federal support for water and wastewater system improvements is essential for local communities to ensure adequate water supply and water quality and to achieve the multiple benefits that accrue from effective water resource management.

Federal management of national waterways and investment in key flood control and ecosystem restoration projects are critical to the Kansas City region.

Key policy position: MARC supports funding and authorization requests for flood control and watershed planning and projects in the Kansas City area as outlined by MOARK, the Missouri and Associated Reivers Network. Projects include flood risk evaluation, green infrastructure, ecosystem restoration, bank stabilization, and river navigation.

Key policy position: Federal support for energy conservation and renewable energy sources are important to enhance our region's quality of life and lower costs for residents and businesses.

Legislation has been introduced annually since 2016 to establish a federal assistance program for water, sewer and stormwater system ratepayers. The act's premise is similar to that of the energy sector's Low-Income Household Energy Assistance Program that there may be a role for the federal government to offer assistance to communities and low-income ratepayers in paying water and sewer rates. Such assistance would reflect the fact that federal mandates frequently drive water, wastewater, and stormwater rate increases, and that many communities are challenged in charging the true cost of service and compliance because of the inability of lower-income ratepayers to pay increased rates.

Key policy position: MARC supports legislation that assists low-income households in covering their costs for water, sewer and stormwater fees.

Economic development

MARC has received support from the U.S Economic Development Administration since 2006 as an Economic Development District. In addition, MARC and many community organizations have secured EDA grants to support important projects.

Key policy position: The Congressional delegation is urged to approve reauthorization of the EDA as an important federal agency helping communities and regions advance economic progress and address challenges limiting economic progress.

The Kansas City region was recently awarded a Tech Hub designation by EDA to broaden and strengthen the biologics industry sector. An opportunity for significant federal resources through an EDA competitive grant could support the tech hub work.

Key policy position: The Congressional delegation is urged to support the region's Tech Hub grant.

Public health

Congress appropriated substantial dollars to help state and local public health agencies respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. These resources were essential, given years of funding cutbacks for the nation's public health infrastructure.

Key policy position: As special COVID-19 funding for public health expires or is reduced, Congress should consider ongoing funds to support foundational capabilities for disease surveillance, epidemiology and lab capacity; the capacity to respond to all hazards preparedness and response; and equity to end health disparities and promote optimal health.

Early education

One of the greatest challenges facing the return of workers to the labor market is the availability of affordable child care. Data shows that many women who were in the workforce prior to the pandemic have not been able to return due to the lack of child care. Low wages and limited benefits have resulted in fewer professionals entering the field of early education and many in the field are now leaving due to low wages and stress of being essential workers. Research has shown that the Head Start program with its comprehensive approach to child development and family support has tremendous long-term impact on helping low-income families succeed. However, despite serving over a million low-income children nationwide, fewer than half of eligible children are able to benefit from Head Start and less than 8% participate in Early Head Start.

Key policy position: The federal government should support:

- Universal pre-K.
- Increased funding for Head Start and Early Head Start to serve more eligible children with comprehensive services and better support the Head Start workforce.
- Full funding for the Child Care and Development Grant Program to help low-income working households to return to or remain in the labor force.
- Increased funding for Preschool Development Grants to allow states to implement improvements to their systems.
- Making the Child and Dependent Care Tax credit fully refundable and adaptable so families receive credit for the types of child care they choose.

Thriving older adults and communities

The Older Americans Act provides resources to support vulnerable older adults in urban, suburban and rural areas to keep them in their homes and avoid expensive institutional care. No one population segment was impacted more than older adults in the early months of the pandemic. The need for home delivered meals, in-home services, caregiver services, adult protective services and other supports are critical to address the needs of this large and growing population group.

Key policy position: As the nation's number and needs of older adults continue to increase, additional funding is needed to serve this population through the Older Americans Act to promote healthy aging and wrap-around services allowing older adults to age in place.

Affordable housing

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of affordable housing was already at crisis levels in many places, and those on limited incomes have continued to feel the pressure of rising housing costs. MARC works with the Greater Kansas City Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) in building the Regional Housing Partnership to enhance systems for creating and preserving affordable and accessible housing. Federal programs that help make housing affordable – such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, HOME Investment Partnerships Program, Historic Preservation Tax Credit, public housing and housing vouchers – have enabled millions of low-income households to secure safe and adequate housing, and are critical in continuing this work. Additionally, new programs like the Pathways to Removing Obstacles to Housing (PRO Housing) allow for regional collaboration in creating programs and policies that encourage housing diversity and affordability. MARC submitted a collaborative application with community partners to take advantage of this new federal program.

Key policy position: Congress is urged to continue to appropriate funds for housing for low-income persons and families and to encourage cross-jurisdictional collaboration and innovation for housing programs. Congressional members are also encouraged to support

initiatives to increase the supply of attainable housing for all Americans.

Workforce development

Since its adoption in 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act has never been fully funded at levels authorized in its legislation. The funding formula works against urban and suburban job centers with a significant employment base and many employers facing challenges in finding trained talent. The formula looks at the number of workers rather than available jobs. Business engagement and services metrics should be included in the program's funding formula to ensure support for employers is taken into consideration when allocating funds.

Key policy position: MARC supports the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act with funding at the authorized level and with particular focus on helping workforce boards assist businesses in finding and training potential job seekers.

MARC supports the following goals to support the capacity of higher education institutions to meet the needs of both workers and employers to stabilize and grow our regional economy.

Key policy positions:

- Invest in community college-business partnerships as part of Higher Education Act reauthorization.
- Modernize and expand apprenticeship programs and ensure sufficient funding for workforce systems to assist businesses in development and implementation of such programs.
- Expand Pell Grant eligibility to cover high-quality, short-term credential programs; increase funding for career and technical education and adult basic education.

Broadband and Digital Equity

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) supported by the Federal Communications Commission assists low-income households to enroll in affordable broadband services - essential for working, learning and community connections. The program is expected to deplete existing funds by April 2024. The ACP Extension Act has been introduced in both the House and Senate to extend support for the program at least through December 2024. While Congress has appropriated sizable funds for broadband infrastructure and digital equity programs, funds are not included for affordable broadband subscription services.

Key policy position: MARC supports an extension of the Affordable Connectivity Program.

Homeland security

Key policy position: MARC supports the continued designation and financial support of the Kansas City region as a UASI region to ensure the area’s ongoing capacity to protect, respond to, and recovery from man-made and natural disaster events.

Health and human services

Key policy position: Federal health care programs should utilize the capacity of local EMS agencies to provide cost-effective emergency response, preventive care and non-emergency services.

Emergency services and public safety

Key policy position: MARC supports reauthorization and modernization of the Federal Flood Insurance Program (set to expire on Dec. 31, 2023), including new mapping of the 100-year floodplain to ensure areas throughout the nation are aware of the hazards faced through increased flood risks.

Key policy position: Encourage the Congressional delegation to support H.R. 1629, the 911 SAVES Act, to reclassify public safety telecommunicators from clerical to a protective service occupation within the standard occupation classification system.

Key policy position: MARC supports H.R. 1784 to amend the National Telecommunications and Information Administration Organization Act to provide for further deployment and coordination of Next Generation 911.