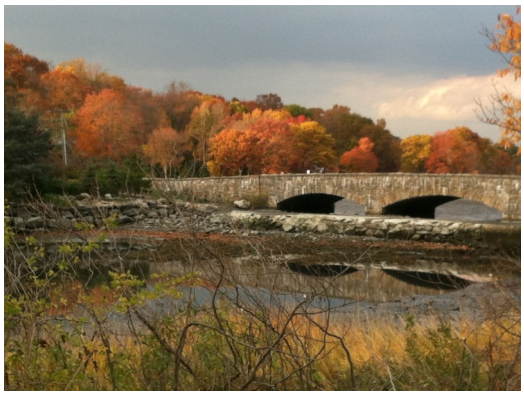
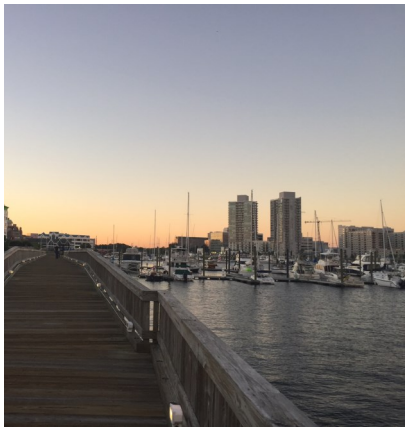
Western Connecticut
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS





2016 ANNUAL REPORT

WESTCOG

One Riverside Road Sandy Hook, CT 06482

PREFACE

The mission of the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) is to meet the needs of its communities for quality government, regional cooperation, economies of scale and innovation. Encompassing 17% of Connecticut's population, the boundary of the Western Connecticut Region is defined by the CT Office of Policy and Management (OPM).

The WestCOG board is composed of the mayors and first selectmen of eighteen communities: Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Norwalk, Redding, Ridgefield, Sherman, Stamford, Weston, Westport and Wilton.

The organization of this report is designed to meet state statutory requirements for councils of governments to describe their current regional services and progress in developing additional services. A summary of those statutory requirements is at the end of this report.

The traditional activity area for councils of governments is in regional planning. While planning remains active, the intent of the General Assembly is for regional services to be an area of expanded activity. With that guidance in mind, report organization reflects the following categories:

1. Public Administration and Communications
2. Regional Planning Activities
3. Current Services - Benefits Not Quantified
4. Current Services - Benefits Quantified
5. Development of Additional Services
6. Inventory of Publications
7. CT Section 8-31b(c) Requirements

As documented herein during 2016 the Council worked hard to assist its municipalities. Questions on this report are welcome and can be directed to WestCOG Executive Director, Francis Pickering, at fpickering@westcog.org or 203-965-4968.

Formatted to meet the service development reporting requirements of CT General Statutes Section 8-31b(c)

WESTCOG MEMBERS:

Boughton, Mark, Mayor of Danbury
Chapman Susan, **SECRETARY** and New Fairfield First Selectman
Cope, Clay, Sherman First Selectman
Daniel, Nina, Weston First Selectman
Dunn, Stephen, Brookfield First Selectman

Gronbach David, Mayor of New Milford
Knickerbocker, Matthew, **CHAIRMAN** and First Selectman of Bethel
Llodra, Patricia, **TREASURER** and Newtown First Selectman
Mallozzi, Robert, New Canaan First Selectman
Marconi, Rudy, Ridgefield First Selectman

Marpe, James, Westport First Selectman
Martin, David, Mayor of Stamford
Pemberton, Julia, Redding First Selectman
Read, Curtis, Bridgewater First Selectman
Rilling, Harry, Mayor of Norwalk

Stevenson Jayme, **VICE CHAIRMAN** and Darien First Selectman
Tesei, Peter, Greenwich First Selectman
Vanderslice Lynne, Wilton First Selectman

WESTCOG STAFF:

Bastian, James, Planning Aide
Brinton, Robert, Project Manager
Chew, Jonathan, Senior Project Manager
Dawson, James, GIS Analyst
Esposito, Elizabeth, Associate Planner
Hadjstylianos, Kristin, Associate Planner

Harvey, Josephine, Financial Manager
Kenny, William, Associate Planner
Payne, Patricia, Senior Financial Manager
Pickering, Francis, **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**
Sachnin, Robert, Senior Planner

Sullivan, Michael, GIS Analyst
Sullivan, Nicole, Communications Assistant
Towle, Michael, Associate Planner
Wells, Galen, Regional Election Monitor
Zimmerman, Carl, Senior GIS Manager

REVENUE FOR FY2015-16:

USDOT	48.7%
CTOPM	29.2%
Membership Dues	10.1%
CTDOT	8.0%
USDHS	2.4%
Other	1.6%
Total	**100.0% ($2,679,948)**

1. PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

1-1: FORUM FOR MUNICIPAL LEADERS

Francis Pickering, Executive Director

As authorized by municipal ordinances and State Statute Section 4-124j, eighteen mayors and first selectmen represent their municipalities and compose the board of WestCOG (the Council). Meetings of this leadership group are the backbone of the organization.

During the 2016 reporting period nine meetings of the Council were held, the agendas and minutes for which are posted on westcog.org. The public has an opportunity to speak at each meeting. Agendas feature guest speakers, staff reports, financial oversight, peer group exchange, advocacy, planning, and service coordination.

1-2: LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Francis Pickering, Executive Director

State legislation needed, and reaction to legislation proposed, was presented to legislators at a January breakfast meeting. Staff then monitors legislation during the session and provided periodic status reports to Council members and state legislators. There is also advocacy with selected federal legislation.

1-3: WESTCOG WEB SITE

Carl Zimmerman, Senior GIS Manager
Elizabeth Esposito, Associate Planner

The Council's westcog.org provides access to information on all Council programs. The related monthly newsletter highlights planning news and grant opportunities.

1-4: ASSISTANCE TO MUNICIPAL REGISTRARS

Galen Wells, Regional Election Monitor

In compliance with state statute, WestCOG provides assistance to municipalities in preparing for elections. Assistance includes staff training and the introduction to technology enhancements.

1-5: EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Michael Towle, Associate Planner

The CT Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, through its Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS), partners with WestCOG and the other regional councils on emergency preparedness activities.

As they were pre-merger, the eight southern WestCOG communities are within DEMHS Region 1 and the ten northern communities remain within DEMHS Region 5. New Canaan First Selectman Robert Mallozzi represents the southern communities at Region 1 and

Ridgefield First Selectman Rudy Marconi represents the northern communities at Region 5.

Each DEMHS region develops funding priorities, training and exercises, sharing of resources, and support for functional committees.

1-6: DRUG TASK FORCE

Elizabeth Esposito, Associate Planner

Due to crisis conditions, in 2015 WestCOG organized this Task Force to coordinate staffs and stakeholders addressing the opioid epidemic. Their Opioid Response Coordination Plan was presented at the April WestCOG meeting. Coordination continues and a web page is maintained.

1-7: EDUCATION TO PREVENT TICK BORNE ILLNESSES

Jonathan Chew, Senior Project Manager

Prior to the merger this activity was a focus of the northern towns. As of 7/1/2016 WestCOG is funding the Ridgefield Health Department to provide the educational program to community groups region wide.

1-8: RESPONSE TO REQUESTS AND OTHER ASSISTANCE

Good constituent service is the foundation of the organization. The staff responds to requests from members, businesses, municipal commissions and community groups.

PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE

William Kenny, Associate Planner

Since 2006 a public health directors group has been meeting for the Council's DEMHS 5 area, staff attend and administer the Committee's budget.

MUNICIPAL PLANNERS' LUNCH

Elizabeth Esposito, Associate Planner

Staff convenes quarterly educational and networking sessions for municipal planners. Skills are sharpened by technical exchange and presentations.

TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP

Robert Sachnin, Senior Planner

Staff convenes monthly meetings of public works and engineering department staff. Input is provided to transportation and environmental planning programs. As with the planners group above skills are sharpened by technical exchange and presentations.

TRAFFIC COUNTS

James Dawson, GIS Analyst

It is more efficient for WestCOG to undertake this municipal task than each municipality. Initiated in September of 2016, results to the end of 2016 are Danbury 10, Darien 20, Greenwich 3, New Milford 3, Redding 6 and Stamford 20 for a total of 62 intersections counted.

IVES TRAIL ASSOCIATION WEB SITE

WestCOG provides web site hosting within westcog.org for this regional non-profit trail group.

"ACCESS WESTERN CT" WEB SITE

WestCOG provides web site hosting for this northern sub regional economic development site.

ARMY CORPS FLOOD STUDY

Michael Towle, Associate Planner

Staff assists the Corps as the intermediary with shoreline governments. Tasks include data gathering and GIS mapping.

PLANNING AND ZONING REFERRALS

Jonathan Chew, Senior Project Manager

The Connecticut General Statutes specify procedural requirements for municipal planning and zoning commissions to submitting referrals to WestCOG. The staff responded to 98 referrals this calendar year.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) WORKING GROUP

Elizabeth Esposito, Associate Planner
James Dawson, GIS Analyst

Staff convenes quarterly educational and networking sessions for municipal IT staff. Skills are sharpened by technical exchange and presentations.

VARIOUS

Provide state and federal wetlands data, topography, and imagery to Sherman, Bethel discharge detection pilot project, tests to model micro-scale ecology along I-95 in Darien, maps for the Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership, etc.

2. REGIONAL PLANNING ACTIVITIES

2-1: REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Robert Sachnin, Senior Planner
Robert Brinton, Project Manager
Kristin Hadjstylianos, Associate Planner
James Bastian, Planning Aide
Jonathan Chew, Senior Project Manager

Transportation systems in urban areas are regional by nature. Operating since 1975, regional transportation planning continued its large role throughout 2016.

The Congressional intent for regional transportation planning is to maximize the cost-benefit of federal expenditures on transportation. Detailed technical studies and a constrained capital improvement program are produced.

Thru their approval power over federally funded capital projects, the 'Transportation Improvement Program," area chief elected officials maintain a significant partnership with CTDOT. In addition, the Council is responsible for solicitation, review, and submission of funding applications under a variety of transportation programs.

A requirement for receipt of federal transportation project funds in urban areas is the operation of a specialized policy entity known as a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). During 2016 ten meetings of the northern Housatonic Valley MPO (HVMPO) were held, chaired by Ridgefield First Selectman Rudy Marconi.

Also during 2016 eleven meetings of the southern South Western Region MPO (SWRMPO) were held, chaired by Darien First Selectman Jayme Stevenson. Then nine meetings of the MPO supporting Technical Advisory Group (TAG) were held.

Minutes for MPO and TAG meetings are posted to the web site. Numerous transportation related web pages are maintained. Each MPO has its own formally endorsed Regional Transportation Plan. Detailing of transportation planning activities conducted is provided in quarterly reports submitted to members and CTDOT.

2-2: REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Elizabeth Esposito, Associate Planner

Like transportation, economic development is very regional in its impacts. A federal "Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy" (CEDS) is required to qualify municipalities for federal economic and environmental clean-up funds.

A new CEDS, combining and updating the two pre-merger economic plans, began with a federal grant award in September of 2016. Policy aspects become part of the legislative agenda. An advisory group meets to guide the process and a web page is maintained.

2-3: WATER UTILITY COORDINATION PLANNING

Michael Towle, Associate Planner

WestCOG is assisting the CT Department of Public Health with the operation of its Water Utility Coordinating Committee (WUCC) planning process, operating under CT Statutes 25-33d through 25-33j. A key activity is to recommend exclusive service areas for water providers. WestCOG has a voting seat and is represented by Bridgewater First Selectman Curtis Read.

3. CURRENT SERVICES - BENEFITS NOT QUANTIFIED

3-1: ADMINISTER LOCAL TRANSPORTATION CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Robert Sachnin, Senior Planner
Robert Brinton, Project Manager

LOTCIP is a state funded transportation improvement grant program to municipal governments thru WestCOG. The regional role is "service" and not planning.

The Council prioritizes funding for municipal projects with cumulative state funding authorized at $41,238,000 for the WestCOG region as of 12/31/2016. Municipalities may select from WestCOG's pre-approved lists of consultants for assistance with design and construction phases.

3-2. STORMWATER MANAGEMENT PLANNING SERVICES

Michael Towle, Associate Planner

To achieve economies of scale, the Council has taken on some of the new federal "MS4" stormwater planning requirements placed upon municipalities. These are the stormwater management template, stormwater infrastructure mapping, networking and coordination meetings. In cooperation with CT DEEP and UCONN CLEAR some WestCOG products are serving as statewide models.

3-3: HAZARD MITIGATION PLANS

As above, economies of scale are achieved through regional preparation, in this case for the entire document. These plans are mandatory to pre-qualify municipal hazard mitigation applications. For those completed to date see the Inventory of Publications.

4. CURRENT SERVICES – BENEFITS QUANTIFIED

4-1: GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM (GIS) SERVICES

Carl Zimmerman, Senior GIS Manager
Michael Sullivan, GIS Analyst
James Dawson, GIS Analyst,
Michael Towle, Associate Planner

Digital geographic data is now routinely utilized in a variety of municipal functions from planning to public works, property assessment to emergency management. By working jointly through WestCOG, municipalities are receiving GIS services and data at least cost.

Documentation of a high benefit to cost ratio was included within the grant application to OPM. The resulting WestCOG GIS services consist of three parts: data infrastructure development, analysis, and then mapping and visualization.

Data infrastructure development consists of technologies that modify, enhance, aggregate, assemble, and filter data to optimize usability, adaptability, and functionality. In determining functionality, municipal needs are paramount.

Data development also facilitates regional transportation, economic, environmental, and public health planning and analytics. Non-governmental organizations also have access to the data.

The GIS staff provides innovative data analyses to member municipalities utilizing statistical, database, GIS, and computer methods. With significant analytic capacities, WestCOG can provide new types of information and analyses across the entire region.

The GIS staff also creates mapping and visualization products to facilitate planning and communication of complicated geographic data. This data is provided through the new Regional GIS Portal, websites, and traditional maps. GIS training is also provided to municipal staffs.

4-2: PURCHASING COLLABORATIVE

Patricia Payne, Senior Financial Manager

Of Connecticut's nine councils of governments, the Capitol Region provides the most advanced services in this area. Outlying COGs are eligible to join their group bidding process. WestCOG has done so and is funding 18 municipal memberships under a group membership rate. Cost savings thru group purchasing are documented on the Capitol Region web site.

4-3. FLOOD PROTECTION RATING SYSTEM

Michael Towle, Associate Planner

The National Flood Insurance Program's Community Rating System includes a voluntary incentive for municipal floodplain management to exceed minimum standards. The result is that policy holder premiums are reduced. Communities are being assisted by WestCOG to join. The target is rate payer savings within the 18 town area of $810,000 annually.

4-4: SEPTAGE DISPOSAL ADMINISTRATION

Jonathan Chew, Senior Project Manager

WestCOG provides administration of septage hauler permits and pumper truck decals for a regional septage management disposal system based in Danbury and including six neighboring communities. Calculations of savings were included within the 1980s grant application. A digital update is scheduled for 2017.

5. DEVELOPMENT OF ADDITIONAL SERVICES

5-1: EFFICIENT SNOW REMOVAL ALONG BORDERS

Cooperating communities elsewhere have obtained savings by adjusting public works snow removal practices along town lines to make them more efficient. This effort will engage an OPM funded consultant to recommend route optimization. (Staff lead to be assigned.)

5-2: OPTIONS FOR REGIONAL COMPUTER ASSISTED MASS APPRAISAL (CAMA)

Carl Zimmerman, Senior GIS Manager

Work is in progress to determine if regionalizing CAMA elements would be feasible and cost-effective, and if so, to develop a structure and plan for municipalities to migrate to it on a voluntary basis.

5-3: PUBLIC WORKS AUTOMATIC VEHICLE LOCATION SERVICE

Carl Zimmerman, Senior GIS Manager

A WestCOG project enabling efficiency is the Public Works Automatic Vehicle Location Service for Norwalk, Westport and Wilton. Equipment is being purchased by WestCOG for municipal management of public works vehicles via global positioning system devices.

6. INVENTORY OF PUBLICATIONS

All Staff

Many WestCOG initiatives yield an accompanying report. The cumulative inventory of these provides a useful overview of Council activity. Those in progress are shown in bold.

For continuity the inventory includes the more recent publications from predecessor SWRPA labeled "Subregion South" and predecessor HVCEO labeled "Subregion North."

WESTCOG

Efficient Snow Removal Along Borders (start pending) – Staff lead to be assigned
Freight Plan Update (start pending) - Staff leads K. Hadjstylianos and J. Bastian
Municipal Stormwater Management Report (in progress) - Staff lead M. Towle
Electric Vehicle Charging Station Availability (in progress)– Staff lead M. Sullivan
Municipal Stormwater Management Report (in progress) - Staff lead M. Towle
Economic Development Strategy (in progress) – Staff lead E. Esposito
2016 Regional GIS and GIS Alternatives

SUBREGION SOUTH

2016 Hazard Mitigation Plan
2015 Regional Transportation Plan
2012 Saugatuck River Watershed Plan

2012 Mianus River Watershed Plan
2012 Five Mile River Watershed Plan

2010 Housing Demand Study
2010 Costs of Congestion
2009 Rail Parking Study
2009 Intelligent Transportation
2009 Housing Report

2007 Open Space Inventory
2006 Conservation and Development Plan
2001 Transit Card Study
2001 Bridgeport Casino Impacts

SUBREGION NORTH

2016 Function Needs Sheltering Plan
2016 SweetHART Efficiency Study
2015 Danbury to Norwalk Bus Evaluation
2015 Regional Transportation Plan
2015 Greater Danbury Bike Plan

2011 Rail Freight Services
2011 Bus Efficiency Study
2010 Bus Service Plan
2009 Rail Parking Study
2009 Conservation and Development Plan

2008 Housing Assessment
2008 History of Bus Service
2008 Harlem Shuttles
2007 Transit to Bridgeport and Waterbury
2006 Public Health Mutual Aid

BETHEL

2015 Hazard Mitigation Plan
2012 Curb Cut Plan
2010 TOD Feasibility Study
2006 Watershed Protection Plan

BRIDGEWATER

2015 Hazard Mitigation Plan
2008 Pedestrian Plan

BROOKFIELD

2015 Route 202 Plan
2014 Hazard Mitigation Plan

DANBURY

2013 West Street Traffic Plan
2012 Hazard Mitigation Plan
2011 Route 806 Study
2011 I-84 Emergency Plan
2009 I-84 Toll Study

2008 Hospital "H" Sign Plan
2007 Hospital – University Traffic Plan

DARIEN

Noroton Heights Station Area Study (in progress) – Staff lead K. Hadjstylianos
2014 Salt Marsh Study
2012 Route 1 Traffic Study
2009 Rail Station Parking

GREENWICH

2014 Salt Marsh Study
2011 Route 1 Traffic Study
2009 Bus Rapid Transit

NEW FAIRFIELD

2011 Hazard Mitigation Plan
2005 Beautification Plan

NEW MILFORD

2015 Hazard Mitigation Plan
2008 Curb Cut Plan
2007 Still River Greenway

NEWTOWN

2015 Hazard Mitigation Plan
2010 Curb Cut Plan
2006 Queen Street Traffic Plan
2003 Queen Street Pedestrian Plan
1997 Hawleyville Traffic Study

NORWALK

Main Avenue Transportation Study (in progress) – Staff lead J. Chew
2014 Salt Marsh Study
2009 Safe Routes to Roton School
2009 Bus Rapid Transit
2007 Merritt 7 Transit Marketing
2004 Rail Station Parking
2001 Norwalk Islands Canoe Guide

REDDING

2015 Hazard Mitigation Plan
2001 Georgetown Beautification Plan

RIDGEFIELD

Branchville TOD Study (in progress) – Staff lead J. Chew
2015 Hazard Mitigation Plan
2011 Route 7 Plan
2006 Curb Cut Plan
2005 Route 35 Traffic Plan

SHERMAN

2011 Hazard Mitigation Plan
2007 Center Pedestrian Plan

STAMFORD

Bus and Shuttle Study (in progress) – Staff lead K. Hadjstylianos
Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (in progress) – Staff lead K. Hadjstylianos
2015 Glenbrook – Springdale TOD
2014 Salt Marsh Study
2013 East Main Transit Mode
2012 Bicycle-Pedestrian Safety Corridors Study
2011 Route 1 Study
2008 Transit Marketing

WESTPORT

Rail Parking Analysis (in progress) – Staff lead K. Hadjstylianos
2016 Bus Study
2014 Salt Marsh Study
2014 Rail Parking Conditions

WILTON

2011 Route 7 Plan

7. CT SECTION 8-31B(C) STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Connecticut General Statutes Section 8-31b(c) requires the nine Councils of Governments in Connecticut to submit annual reports describing their services.

Below is an excerpt from the statutory language that structures this report. Each is followed by a statement of how WestCOG meets the requirement.

1) A description of any regional program, project or initiative provided or planned by such regional council of governments.

The body of the text above provides descriptions of current and anticipated programs. Note that in the case of the CT OPM defined WestCOG region, until 1/1/2015 its 18 municipalities had been operating separately as two smaller CT OPM regions, 8 municipalities in the south and 10 in the north. In most cases, services and programs tied to those older geographies are being continued by WestCOG.

2) A description of any expenditure, including the source of funding, spent on each such regional program, project or initiative and a cost-benefit analysis for such expenditure.

WestCOG understands that OPM and the Legislature are seeking more use of fiscally based cost/benefit evaluations and will increasingly provide them. Yet it is challenging to specify dollar costs for minor programs that are supported by general operating funds and not reflected within specific budget line items.

While the quantification of costs and benefits can be increased as the organization moves forward, non-numeric evaluations have a continuing role for some services that by their nature do not lend themselves to monetary summation.

For example, OPM's Regional Performance Incentive Program guidelines require cost benefit assessments, but the requirement is relaxed for proposed services that are not practical to express in monetary terms. Such is the case with some WestCOG initiatives that improve public safety or reduce health risk.

A non-monetary analysis is again the case for those WestCOG services that enhance communications between municipal departments and professionals. Net positive benefits are assumed, as evidenced by continuing utilization of the regional forums by municipal staffs.

3) A list of existing services provided by a municipality or by the state that, in the opinion of the regional council of governments, could be transferred to such regional council of governments and any efficiency associated with such transfer.

There are, as yet, no municipal or state services planned for transfer in their entirety to WestCOG. Promoting regional efficiencies by such regionalization has long been limited within Connecticut by the lack of regional public works or other operational infrastructure, such as is found in states with county government.

Currently WestCOG is focusing on improving the efficiency of existing municipal services while those services remain municipally based. This requires regionalizing selected municipal service aspects to improve the efficiency of delivery.

4) A discussion and review of the performance of any regional program, project or initiative, including any recommendations for legislative action.

The two WestCOG programs with the largest budget shares are the transportation planning program for its combination of staffing and contracted services, and then the geographic information services contracted program.

Both programs are derived from funding sources that require detailed progress reports. These existing reporting formats can double to serve the intent of CGS Section 8-32b(c) for annual reports by WestCOG.

As for recommendations for legislative action, WestCOG annually formulates a Regional Legislative Agenda, presented at a regional forum with area legislators. Progress with WestCOG legislative priorities is monitored by staff thereafter.

We will include within this policy vehicle any recommendations relating to legislative authorizations or clarifications needed to better structure efficient regional services. We will also include such recommendations herein as this report is updated annually.

5) Specific annual goals and objectives and quantifiable outcome measures for each program, project or initiative administered or provided by such regional council of governments.

Setting specific annual goals and objectives is achievable and will be incorporated into more of this Council's activities as the new emphasis gains momentum.