



## Ladders of Opportunity Overview - 2017

*“At a time when our nation has so much infrastructure to repair and replace, we have a chance to do so in a much more inclusive way that will simultaneously expand economic opportunity and socioeconomic mobility throughout America. The choices we make about future transportation projects, the people they touch and places they connect, will play a role in determining how widely opportunity expands throughout America. Together, we can build a stronger and more connected nation, a healthier economy, and more vibrant communities.”* – U.S. Department of Transportation

### What are Ladders of Opportunity?

The US DOT has introduced an initiative for a “Ladders of Opportunity” analysis in transportation project development and funding decisions. It calls for not only technical merits, but also for social and economic impacts, to be identified and addressed.

“Ladders of Opportunity” is a metaphor for the favorable circumstances that empowers a person to reach to a better quality of life. It focuses on the relationship between transit and employment and the importance of this vital link.

An important new feature within the federal transportation planning process is a requirement that each transportation planning region address the transportation needs of its population from the perspective of “Ladders of Opportunity:” how can federal transportation funds improve the lives of residents with fewer economic resources?

This document serves as a summary of WestCOG’s comprehensive Ladders of Opportunity report.

#### Disciplines

- Transportation Planning & Analytics
- Spatial & Data Analysis
- Environmental & Urban Planning
- Geographic Information Systems

#### Analysis

WestCOG addresses Ladders planning by analyzing and evaluating data, including the preparation of maps to understand the spatial distribution of this regional endeavor. Through this resource all participants in transportation decision-making will have an objective reference for promoting positive Ladders related transportation investment.



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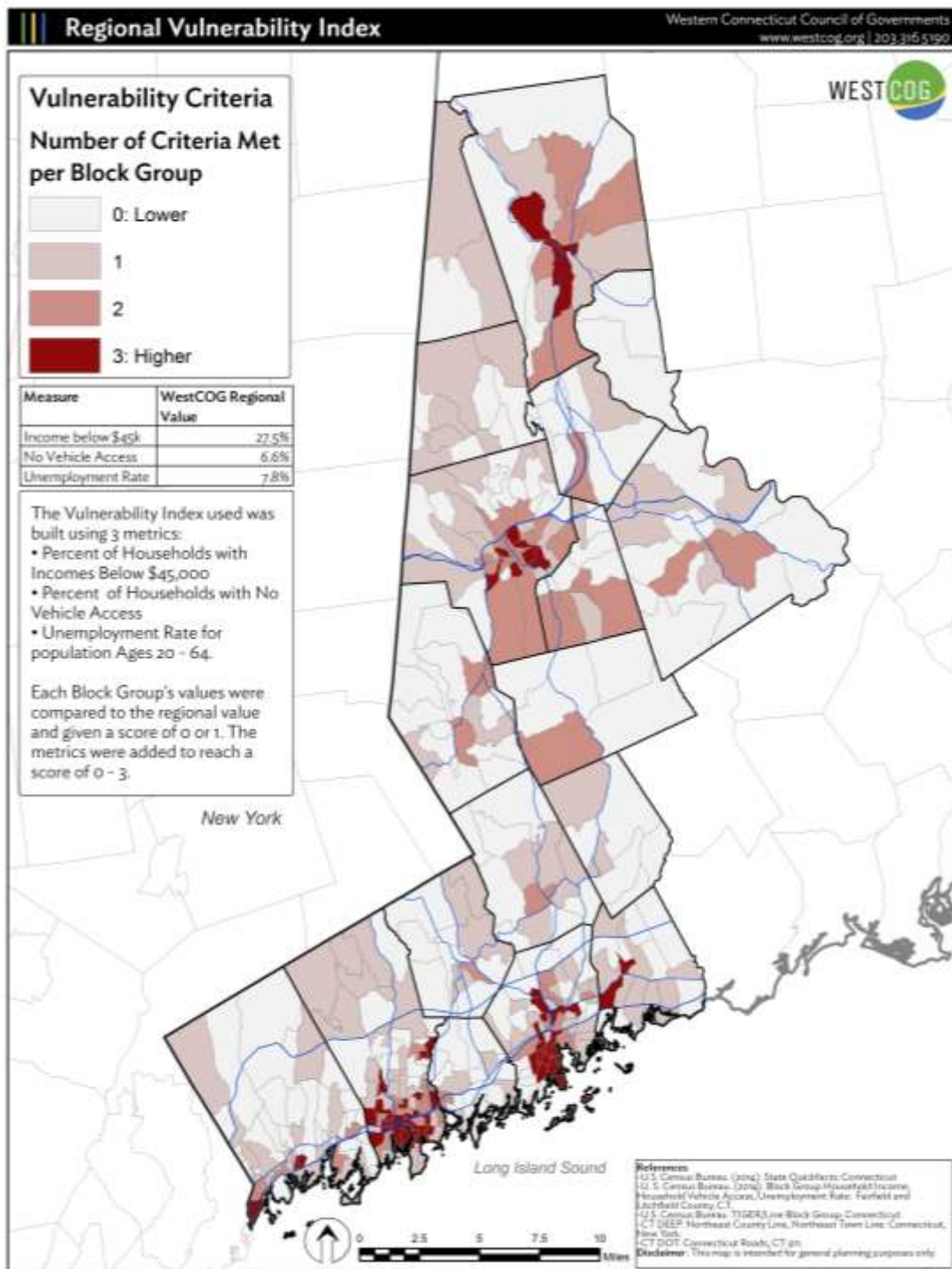
## Vulnerable Populations

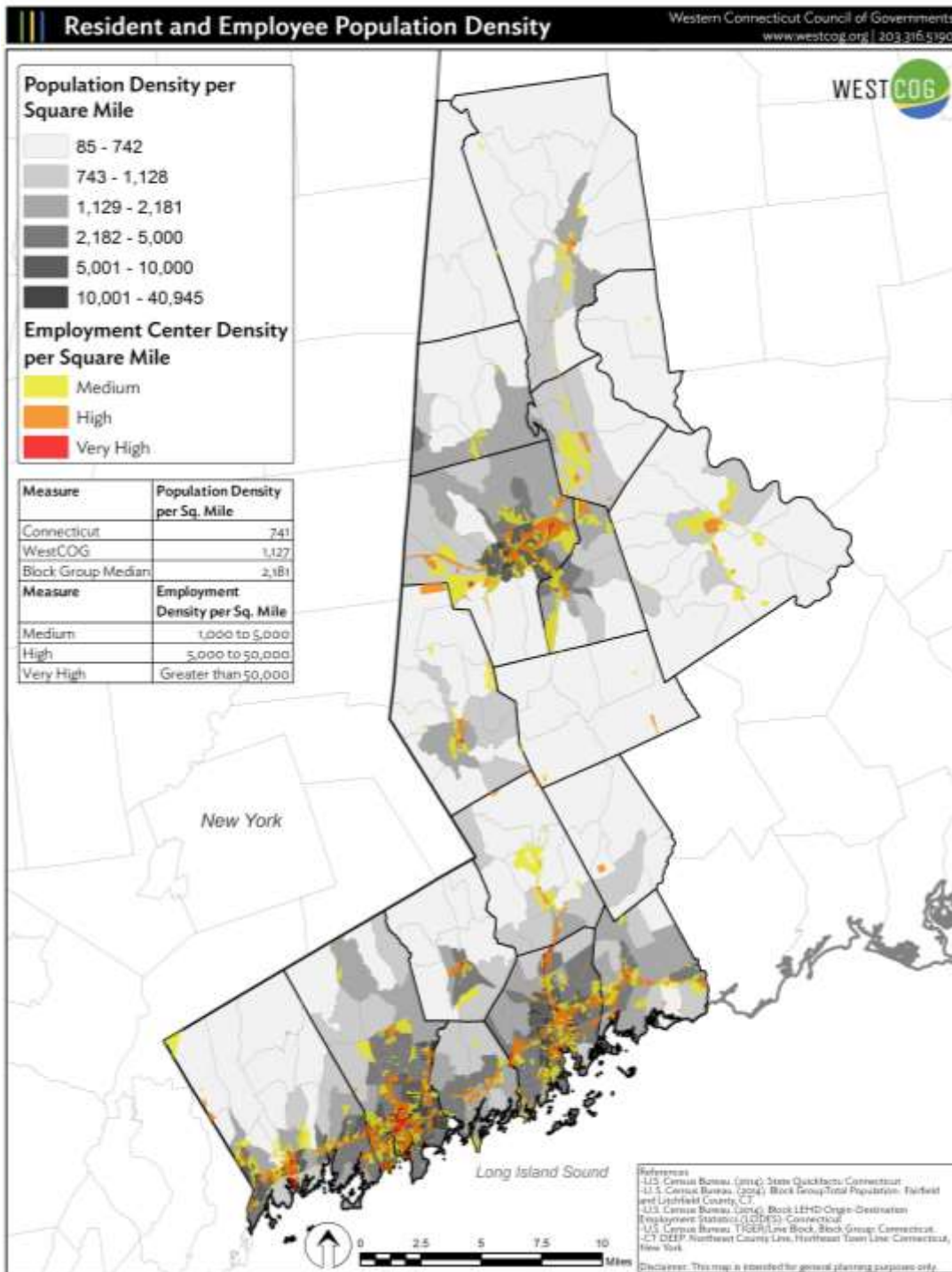
Many factors impact a person's access to economic opportunity. Out of all the factors assessed, the following were collectively analyzed to determine where the vulnerable populations are located in the WestCOG region; income, vehicle access, and unemployment.

Each of these factors represents an obstacle an individual or family must overcome in order to take advantage of economic opportunities. These barriers can be challenging, but combined may identify the most vulnerable neighborhoods.

Some factors magnify or contribute to others. For example, if a resident has a low income, they are likely living on a limited budget, which makes owning a vehicle difficult, and commuting to a job is even more difficult. The same resident, with limited means and without a vehicle, may be unable to attend higher education or English language classes, further narrowing their selection of employment.

Examining the map above, one can see that vulnerable populations tend to be in urban areas, but there are others in New Milford, southwest Greenwich, and Westport.





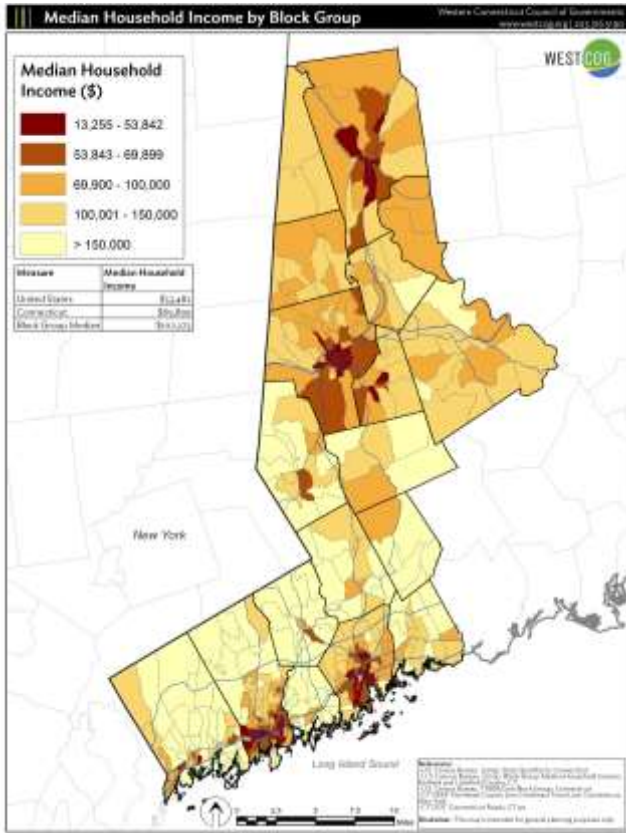
There are services and institutions in the region that support vulnerable populations and address the many barriers they face to improving their quality of life. However, the most direct sustainable way to reduce vulnerability is to have well-paid employment and access to transit.

Increased income can have a transformative effect on the life of an individual and their family, enabling them to take advantage of new and different opportunities. Similar to the factors in vulnerability, employment can magnify other opportunities. For example, access to transit can link an individual to a better-paying job, which enables them to work fewer hours, allowing more time to take job-training or English language classes, the improved education can then make that person qualified for an even better career.

From a visual inspection of the map to the left one can see that employment tends to cluster around transportation infrastructure and population centers, and is highly concentrated in a small number of areas.



# Take Aways



Transit creates a vital link between individuals and economic opportunity.

The urban centers, Danbury, Norwalk, and Stamford, are likely to have more vulnerable populations but also have higher job concentrations. Transportation to provide service these neighborhoods should be improved to continue to assist these communities.

Other areas, like New Milford, Newtown, and Ridgefield, have vulnerable populations but few transit services that would connect these populations to other opportunities. These areas should be considered for new transit projects which address these needs.

It is of note that in some neighborhoods along transit lines, vehicle ownership tends to be lower regardless of income. One can assume that access the transit not only provides a service to those in most in need of it, but also gives those with a higher income choice in their mode of transit. See the full report for more.

## Areas of Statistical and Geographic Analysis

### Regional Overviews:

- Regional Roadway Network
- Regional Transit Network
- Population Density
- Employment Concentration
- Transit Oriented Development Areas
- Environmental Justice Areas

### Populations Impacted by Transit Routing and/or Service Level

- Employment Center Drivesheds
- Population with Less than a High School Degree
- Population with a High School Degree and No Bachelor's (Bottom Left)
- Households with No Vehicle Access
- Working Age Limited English Proficiency Population
- Higher Education Facilities
- Higher Education Drivesheds
- English Language Learning

### Populations Impacted by Fixed Capital Investments

- Median Household Income (Top Left)
- Median Household Income Detailed Sections
- Family Poverty – Connecticut Nutritional Assistance
- Minority Population
- Unemployment Rate

