



October 1, 2018

Regional Service Grant Annual Progress Report

For the fiscal year July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018

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Regional programs, projects, or initiatives provided by WestCOG

Current efforts

The following activities are currently in process through WestCOG.

Public health

Drug Task Force

Due to crisis conditions, in 2015 WestCOG organized a Drug Task Force to coordinate stakeholders in addressing the opioid epidemic. During Task Force meetings, participants hear from experts and network with one another. Peer learning and technical exchange develop capacity in the region.

Community and economic development

Economic Development District

A federal “Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy” (CEDS) is required to qualify municipalities for federal economic development funds. WestCOG developed and adopted a CEDS in 2017. It received State approval in December 2017 and is awaiting federal approval.

The CEDS was informed by WestCOG Economic Advisory Group (EAG). Per EDA requirements, the group features a balance of public and private sector stakeholders and influencers in the region. The purpose of the Advisory Group includes setting goals and strategies for the economic development of the region, as well as the identification of candidate projects of potential funding. To maintain the CEDS, WestCOG conducts focus groups about the needs of various industries.

Plan of Conservation and Development

WestCOG is responsible for the creation and maintenance of a regional comprehensive plan, to ensure that development is orderly, economic, and environmentally and financially sustainable. Plan development includes a range of stakeholders representing all sectors of the region. WestCOG’s next plan will be initiated in 2019.

Land Use Referrals

Proposed changes to municipal zoning regulations and maps, subdivision ordinances, and Plans of Conservation and Development (“referrals”), are evaluated by WestCOG for consistency with the regional comprehensive plan and to reduce conflicts among municipalities. Referrals have resulted in significant cost avoidance and improved development outcomes.

Planners Lunch

Staff convenes educational and collaborative sessions for municipal planners to build capacity and facilitate intermunicipal collaboration in the region.

Transportation planning and programming

Metropolitan planning, including LRTP and TIP

WestCOG hosts and staffs two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), which are federally mandated, designated and funded transportation policy-making organizations. The MPOs in WestCOG comprise the Chief Elected Officials in each municipality and transit representatives, as well as the WestCOG Executive Director and State of Connecticut (in a nonvoting capacity). The MPO designations provide access to multiple federal grants, both discretionary and by formula.

Requirements, which WestCOG meets, include development of a Long-Range Transportation and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIPs within the WestCOG region are programmed to deliver over \$1.5 billion in transportation investment over the next four years.

Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

WestCOG's TAG comprises town planners, engineers, public works officials, transit district representatives, and COG staff. The TAG collaboratively reviews and evaluates proposals, making recommendations to the policy board. Examples of recent TAG initiatives include: prioritizations for federal and state funded project solicitations, MS4 collaboration and regional efficiencies, winter maintenance study, and other important regional efforts.

LOTICIP and Regional Engineer

The Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTICIP) provides funding for projects on local roads. WestCOG solicits and develops projects and programs funds. COG involvement enables efficiency in project delivery, freeing State resources for other activities. Responsibilities include application and design review, with WestCOG's Regional Engineer giving programmatic and technical guidance to municipalities to advance and implement critical infrastructure projects. To date and notwithstanding budget uncertainty, WestCOG is set to receive over \$27.5 million on LOTICIP funding (SFY14-16).

Municipal Transportation and Engineering Assistance

WestCOG provides technical assistance to the region. Assistance includes programmatic and funding guidance, engineering review, planning studies, and data analysis. Recent examples include the a Congestion Relief and Signal Optimization analysis and multiple Road Safety Audits and corresponding WestCOG reports.

Snow Removal Operations, Management and Routing Study

Through a Regional Performance Incentive Program grant (\$254,782), WestCOG is conducting a comprehensive winter highway operations study for the region. The study includes computer optimization of snowplow routes, a best management practice guide for Chloride, Salts and other Deicing Materials; an Operations Guide for recommended best management practices and equipment improvements; and a Snow and Ice Removal Planning Guide. This study provides cost savings to the member municipalities by reducing plowing times and mileage, as well as producing region-wide documents that would have been duplicated by each municipality.

Winter Maintenance and Salt Reduction Training

In November 2017, the region held a training session for public works professionals to expand and refresh their knowledge in deicing and anti-icing application techniques, equipment calibration, effects of different weather conditions and the environmental impacts of chloride materials. Thirty-three attendees from nine municipalities participated, with many acknowledging the benefit of holding similar trainings in the future.

Regional Traffic Counting and Analysis Program

WestCOG possesses traffic cameras that collect up to 50 hours of traffic video for an intersection. Outputs include turning counts for pedestrians, bicycles, cars and heavy vehicles. These data are applicable for a wide range of analyses, including level of service (LOS), pedestrian and cyclist,

intersection signal timing and capacity, traffic control type and signal coordination. In addition, WestCOG radar counters can collect bidirectional volume, speed and vehicle classification for up to four, mid-block lanes. This program provides cost savings for member municipalities through equipment sharing and by using a trained WestCOG staff to conduct analyses.

Environmental management

Water Utility Coordination Planning

WestCOG aids the Department of Public Health with the Water Utility Coordinating Committee (WUCC) planning process. The WUCCs are active in the Development of WUCC plans for three regions in the state. WestCOG provides input on and monitors development of these plans and informs municipalities of WUCC activity. WUCCs are also the forum for delineating exclusive service areas for water providers. WestCOG has a voting seat and is represented by Bridgewater First Selectman Curtis Read.

Regional Flood Insurance Savings Program (Regional CRS)

FEMA's Community Rating System (CRS) discounts flood insurance rates for policyholders in communities that take flood mitigation measures within their community. WestCOG is expanding its pilot CRS Program in Darien, Greenwich and Norwalk to include additional municipalities through automation of CRS reporting and an outreach push. Savings in CRS deployment have been obtained through centralizing of required activities under a single regional entity, WestCOG. Potential savings for policyholders for all eighteen communities in WestCOG totals \$810,000 annually. This program is a replicable model within the United States.

Municipal Stormwater Support Service (MS4)

To achieve economies of scale, WestCOG provides MS4 stormwater planning services regionwide. These include a stormwater management template, stormwater infrastructure mapping, directly connected impervious cover mapping (DCIA), and case study IDDE efforts; WestCOG monitors advancements, resources, and updates from DEEP, other COGs, and UConn CLEAR regarding the MS4 permit. All products developed by WestCOG are replicable and available statewide.

Conservation Support Services

WestCOG aims to incorporate energy, land, and water conservation practices into planning by providing data, analytical, and information monitoring services for regional conservation groups and member municipalities. Services for each sector (energy, land, water) will be funneled into the Sustainable CT initiative such that any interested community who joins the State Program can receive regional credits towards their status in the program.

Energy

WestCOG has analyzed electric vehicle adoption and is developing a solar viability analysis for buildings in the region. Additionally, WestCOG is monitoring the Volkswagen Settlement, which is providing \$55 million to CT to reduce diesel emissions.

Land

WestCOG maintains or provides an open space inventory, land and natural resource priority mapping, and land trust and municipality engagement. WestCOG coordinates its efforts with the regional conservation group Hudson to Housatonic (H2H) to improve results.

Water

WestCOG is active in the development of the state water plan, the WUCC, MS4 permit, watershed alliances, Long Island Sound, and DEEP activities on behalf of the region regarding wetlands, water quality, water based natural resources, and conservation

Regional Tree Canopy Analysis

The regional Tree Canopy Analysis, which is currently under way, calculates the benefits provided by the region's current tree canopy. It also identifies where the canopy could be enhanced, and what the resulting benefits would be. This analysis will assist the municipalities and the region in targeting their investments in the environment for the greatest return.

Information technology

Information Technology (IT) Working Group

WestCOG convenes quarterly educational and networking sessions for municipal IT staff to explore and pursue opportunities for peer learning and resource sharing.

Regional GIS Group

WestCOG convenes educational, networking, technical, and work sessions for GIS professionals in the region to facilitate data, analysis, and mapping cooperation and technical skill improvements.

Regional GIS Mapping, Technical Assistance, and Training

WestCOG provides regional web-based mapping services, support, and analysis. This extends capabilities that are not available at the town level in the region and facilitates projects such as wetlands and contour mapping, recreational planning, and congestion and infrastructure analysis.

Regional GIS and Transportation Data Acquisition and Distribution

WestCOG has taken the lead in GIS data acquisition and archiving for the region. WestCOG plans, collects, curates, and distributes planimetric and imagery data sets for the towns to facilitate their analytic, Computer-Aided Mass Appraisal, transportation and parcel efforts. This simplifies construction, planning, and municipal projects for both individual towns and the region.

GIS and Data Analytics Workflow Automation

WestCOG is working on automation of performance metric creation, project mapping, road surface analysis, web mapping, and other task to increase efficiencies and improve the utility of the massive data sets that are now becoming more common. As these skills are not typically available at the municipal level, this effort brings new planning information and approaches to the region.

Planned efforts

WestCOG plans to launch the following efforts this fiscal year.

Permit study/implementation

WestCOG will create a scope of work, publish a request for proposal, and hire a consulting firm to evaluate opportunities for savings and service improvements through regional sharing, consolidation, outsourcing, or modernization of municipal processes. Processes that may be considered include, but are not limited to, the issuance of licenses and permits (dogs, beach, parking, transfer station access) and backend services (mass appraisal, payment processing).

Outputs include cost benefit analyses, recommendations, and actionable implementation strategies.

Regional GIS integration and enhancement

Together with the Northwest Hills COG, pricing for the creation, enhancement, and maintenance of digital parcel maps, digital assessor records, and online GIS portals will be obtained from vendors. Objectives include the development of regional and local GIS portals, migration to and deployment of uniform data standards, improved uniformity in data quality and availability within the regions, and provision of a geospatial platform upon which to build municipal line-of-business applications (e.g., online permitting, asset management, mass appraisal systems).

Health insurance study

WestCOG will create a scope of work, publish a request for proposal, and hire a consulting firm to evaluate opportunities for savings in municipal health insurance, focusing on economies of scale and regional efficiencies. Options to be considered include regional risk pooling, plan consolidation, and stop-loss insurance and self-insurance. Outputs include feasibility and cost benefit analysis, recommendations, and actionable implementation strategies.

Shared municipal bond counsel and financial adviser

To provide municipalities with sound financial advice and facilitate access to bond markets at a reasonable cost, WestCOG will bid out bond counsel and financial adviser services on a regional basis.

Public safety consolidation/sharing study

To find opportunities to share the costs of operations, facilities, training, and overhead, WestCOG will create a scope of work, publish an RFP, and hire a consulting firm to study public safety services in selected municipalities. Outputs include feasibility and cost benefit analyses, a preferred alternative, and an implementation plan.

Regional Plan of Conservation and Development

WestCOG will initiate the development of a comprehensive plan for Western Connecticut, the first since the consolidation of its predecessor regions. The plan will build on WestCOG's recently-completed Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and on the Long-Range Transportation Plan, which is currently in process. The plan will integrate land use with transportation, economic development, environmental management, and opportunities for intermunicipal cooperation.

Performance of existing regional programs, projects, or initiatives

All existing programs are in budget. The RSG work program was set back by six months due to disruption in the SFY 2018 Regional Services Grant, which led to a work stoppage on projects that were funded by RSG and the departure of key staff from the agency (due to financial uncertainty).

Staffing levels have since been rebuilt, and projects are back on track. It is expected that projects will meet their scheduled targets, provided no further external shocks are encountered.

No complaints were received in 2018 regarding the performance of existing regional efforts.

Opportunities for service provision on a regional basis

There is strong interest on behalf of COG members in regional services. The following opportunities were mentioned by Chief Elected Officials in Western Connecticut.

Regional IT Coordinator

Purpose

Municipalities make and will continue to make significant investments in Information Technology to manage government operations and enhance the delivery of services in a cost-efficient manner. Continuing rapid changes to IT capabilities makes it challenging to keep pace with new technologies that produce improvements/efficiencies in municipal operations. This effort would provide “look-ahead” research and leadership on evolving IT technology as it affects municipal operations, resulting in improved management of software and hardware investments.

Products

The WestCOG Regional IT Coordinator would:

- Provide options for the consolidation of municipal software platforms and applications.
- Develop a program for regional bulk purchasing/installation/training for both municipal software and hardware needs.
- Develop regional strategies for municipal use of Cloud computing and storage resources. Develop a pool of pre-qualified “on-call” IT resources available to support municipal IT operations.
- Develop a regional program to update and test municipal cybersecurity systems. Organize and administer a WestCOG committee of municipal IT managers: Sharing of best IT management practices, identification of future needs....
- A Regional Coordinator would operate from the WestCOG office and would also provide technical IT support to that office, eliminating the need for contracted outside IT services.

Regional Purchasing Coordinator

Purpose

Municipalities have the same core needs in goods and services to support municipal operations. Some of these needs are purchased through the State bid system, others through the Capitol Region Purchasing Council (CRPC), and still others through a municipal bid process. The Regional Purchasing Coordinator would develop an annual schedule of bids for municipal goods and services that would include the State and CRPC bid processes as well as scheduled municipal bids within the WestCOG region. The goal would be to enable WestCOG municipalities to select the best bid process for their respective needs and to enlarge regional bid pools for better quote results.

Product

Provide WestCOG members with a schedule of when various municipal needs for goods and services will be bid to enable municipalities to evaluate all bid opportunities and select the ones which will best meet their respective needs.

Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) Coordinator

Purpose

The Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) provides federal funding to eligible communities in support of community and economic development projects. There are two basic elements of the CDBG program.

- “Small Cities.” This program provides competitive grants to municipalities of under 50,000 residents for projects that achieve local development objectives. Fourteen of WestCOG’s member towns are eligible to participate in this program, and several do participate on a regular basis.
- “CDBG Entitlement Program.” This program makes annual grants, on a formula basis, to cities of at least 50,000 persons to develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities, principally for low- and moderate-income persons. The four largest municipalities in WestCOG participate in this program.

Participation in the CDBG Entitlement Program requires considerable administrative resources to apply for funding and then to oversee the financial management of funded program activities. A regional approach to these administrative activities, funded through the CDBG program, could free-up municipal staff to devote more time to the implementation of funded programs.

Product

WestCOG would assume the administrative requirements of the CDBG’s “Small Cities” and “Entitlement” Programs for those WestCOG municipalities desiring such assistance. This WestCOG regional service function would be funded through the CDBG program. Services provided could include the preparation of CDBG grant applications, and the financial management of funding received through the CDBG program.

Other opportunities

- Regional asset management system. To improve and reduce costs in facilities maintenance.
- Subregional animal control. Consolidation of facilities and/or services.
- Intermunicipal sharing of Fire Marshal personnel.
- Regional fire training facility.
- Regional truck washing facility. To lengthen service life of municipal vehicles.
- Regional driving simulator. To train drivers of municipal and school vehicles, improving safety and reducing insurance premiums.
- Intermunicipal sharing of Health Department/District personnel.
- Assistance to municipal planning and zoning.

Recommendations for legislative action

WestCOG Proposals

WestCOG has identified the following recommendations as ones that would substantially improve and align incentives for regionalization.

Delegate grant programs to the COGs

The Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTICIP), which devolved responsibility for the award of grants for municipal transportation projects from the state Department of Transportation to the COGs, has been a success, accelerating project delivery and reducing administrative costs. Using the LOTICIP model, additional programs that make grants to municipalities (or institutions in municipalities, as in the case of arts, culture, and tourism grants) could be delegated to the COGs.

Enable cities and towns to set fees to cover costs

Note: limitations on the ability of municipalities to set appropriate fees limits the revenues available to cover the transition costs of moving to a regional model.

State law sets out the fees that municipalities may charge for documents, applications, permits, etc., as well as for enforcement of traffic safety laws. Due to inflation, many fees no longer cover the costs of the services they pertain to; some do not even cover the costs of their own collection. Enabling municipalities to set fees to cover costs places responsibility for payment where it belongs (with the service user, rather than the general taxpayer) and will reduce pressure on property taxes.

Make the sharing of school noneducational services with host communities the default. (Require an 'opt-out' rather than 'opt-in'.)

While municipalities and school districts can realize substantial savings through sharing services, examples of sharing are relatively uncommon. This is because the statute on service sharing is an 'opt-in': it assumes that services are not shared unless both parties agree. Reversing this assumption, so that municipalities and school districts are required to share services unless they agree not to, would significantly accelerate the consolidation of services and deliver cost savings.

Work with the federal government to give Connecticut's COGs the access to federal funds that state law says they should have.

Note: this is currently in process.

In most parts of the country without county government, the U.S. government treats the local regions as a 'county equivalents,' which makes those regions eligible for most federal grants. This is consistent with Connecticut state law, which states that the COGs may receive any grants that a county may. For federal agencies to accept applications from the COGs, the State must request that the latter be added to the list of entities treated as county equivalents by the Census Bureau. Such treatment will give Connecticut, via its regions, more opportunities to access federal grants. (Connecticut receives significantly less per capita from the federal government than the average state; two-thirds of this difference is attributable to the lack of eligible grant recipients in Connecticut at the regional level.)

In addition to these recommendations, the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and the Connecticut Council of Small Towns included several suggestions in their recent agendas and reports that could significantly reduce impediments to the regionalization of services, and that may be worthy of consideration. (See attached.)

Recommendations from CCM

CCM's *This Report is Different, Securing the Future: Service Sharing and Revenue Diversification for Connecticut Municipalities* notes that "Local governments and their Councils of Governments are actively pursuing options for increasing interlocal collaboration and service sharing, but these efforts are often hindered by outdated state laws and practices." Selected recommendations from this report follow.

Proposals for expanding shared services and collaboration

- *We recommend changes in the Municipal Employees Relations Act (MERA) that will*
 - *Remove service sharing arrangements as a subject of collective bargaining*
 - *Prevent municipalities from bargaining away or losing through arbitration their right to enter into service sharing arrangements*
 - *When service sharing arrangements affect two or more collective bargaining units, the interests of all employees affected by the new arrangements will be represented by either a coalition of bargaining units or a new bargaining unit will be created to represent all affected employees.*
- *We recommend that state law be changed so that interlocal agreements or service sharing contracts involving two or more municipalities will override any relevant limitations in a participating municipality's charter or ordinances.*
- *We recommend changes in state practices*
 - *Restore funding for the Regional Performance Incentive Program and target that funding on initiatives identified as most effective in reducing costs, improving services or containing further cost increases.*
- *We recommend that the range of approved service delivery activities for COGs be expanded*
- *Other specific recommendations related to education include:*
 - *Consolidate and/or share services for selected non-instructional education expenditure categories across school districts.*
 - *Change state law to allow town governments to require consolidation and/or sharing of non-instructional services and resources between school districts and the municipality in which they are located.'*

The original report is available at <https://www.ccm-ct.org/sites/default/files/files//ThisReportIsDifferent012317.pdf>.

Recommendations from COST

COST's 2018 *Legislative Priorities* includes recommendations to "address barriers that undermine regional/shared service programs." These include:

- *Ensure that there is a mechanism to address collective bargaining issues that undermine regional consolidation efforts or shared services agreements, including providing that consolidation/regionalization efforts are not a mandatory subject of collective bargaining;*
- *Assist municipalities in facilitating the regional consolidation of services to achieve savings by addressing statutory and other barriers to consolidation;*
- *Continue to support regional and municipal shared services through the Councils of Government (COGs); and*
- *Work with the Census Bureau to put COGs on the list of eligible applicants and recipients for federal grants.*

The original document is available at http://www.ctcost.org/Pages/COST_WebDocs/2018leg.

Expenditure of Regional Services Grant funds

WestCOG Regional Services Grant FY17-18 Tracking Sheet
 OPM-SGIA Funding (FY17-18) Spend down from 7/1/17 to 6/30/18

Internal Report (Unaudited)
 Grant No. RSG-018-09

Month	Period ending	Direct Salary	BFO	Direct Travel	Direct Meetings	Equipt. / supplies	Legal fees	Match for DEEP grant	Digital services	Maintenance agreements	Total cost for period	Deferred Rev. Bal.
OCT-DEC	12/31/2017	\$330						\$5,124			\$5,454	\$193,217
JAN	1/31/2018	\$22,336	\$26,627	\$99				\$3,219	\$470	\$23	\$52,774	\$187,763
FEB	2/28/2018	\$18,896	\$22,526	\$1,063	\$128	\$133	\$2,310	\$1,840		\$353	\$47,249	\$134,989
MAR	3/31/2018	\$18,771	\$22,377	\$254	\$147			\$1,794	\$322		\$43,665	\$87,740
												\$44,075
APR	4/30/2018	\$15,406	\$18,365	\$97	\$50	\$463	\$500		\$350	\$3	\$35,234	\$64,406
MAY	5/31/2018	\$19,324	\$23,036	\$210	\$253	\$1,937	\$175		\$340	\$3	\$45,278	\$73,247
JUN	6/30/2018	\$8,023	\$9,564	\$1,290	\$257	\$521			\$350	\$8,294	\$28,299	\$27,969
												(\$330)