

Public Involvement Plan (PIP)

Drafted for the Housatonic Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (HVMPO), South Western Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (SWRMPO) and Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG).



Adopted as of December 15, 2022

ENGLISH: For language assistance or other accommodations, contact Western Connecticut Council of Governments at help@westcog.org
ESPAÑOL: Para asistencia con el idioma y otras adaptaciones, por favor póngase en contacto con WestCOG al help@westcog.org
PORTUGUÊS: Para obter assistência língua ou outras acomodações, entre em contato com WestCOG em help@westcog.org
FRANÇAIS: Pour obtenir de l'aide linguistique ou d'autres mesures d'adaptation, contactez WestCOG à help@westcog.org
POLSKI: Aby uzyskać pomoc językową lub inne zakwaterowanie, skontaktuj się z firmą WestCOG pod adresem help@westcog.org

INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to Title 23 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 450.316, federal transportation planning rules require that WestCOG, SWRMPO and HVMPO maintain the Public Involvement Plan (PIP) as detailed below. The policy objectives for that PIP are to:

- *Educate and inform the public about transportation planning, projects, and issues within their communities and the Region.*
- *Involve the public in the transportation planning process.*
- *Ensure that information is easily accessible to all interested parties in the community.*
- *Improve the decision-making process to include the interest/needs of stakeholders through informed consent.*
- *Continue to evaluate and improve public participation strategies.*

Note that the objectives and administrative practices for Title VI, Environmental Justice, Limited English Proficiency and the Public Involvement Plan have interrelated goals and practices. In addition to the PIP, the aforementioned plans can be found on the WestCOG website for reference. [The Language Assistance Plan](#) is a subset of Title VI and can be found separately. The PIP was adopted on December 15, 2022.

A requirement for receipt of federal transportation planning and project funds in urban areas is the continuing operation therein of a regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The purpose of this document is to provide public involvement policies for the two MPOs within the boundary of the Western CT Council of Governments (WestCOG). As WestCOG administers funds for the two MPOs and serves as their host agency, that Council itself is subject to the Title VI compliance procedures.

The State of Connecticut's defined boundary for the Western Connecticut Planning Region served by WestCOG encompasses eighteen municipalities. Since 1981 there have been two federally structured MPOs operating within this geography.

MPOs have formal roles in the federal transportation planning process along with the Connecticut Department of Transportation and the U.S. Department of Transportation. Federal law (Code of Federal Regulations 23 United States Code §134 - Metropolitan Transportation Planning) defines the structure of MPOs nationwide.

The South Western Region MPO (SWRMPO) encompasses eight municipalities: Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, Norwalk, Stamford, Weston, Westport and Wilton.

The Housatonic Valley MPO encompasses ten municipalities: Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield and Sherman.

Taken together the combined area of the two MPOs precisely matches the eighteen town area of WestCOG. Both MPOs maintain agreements with WestCOG for it to serve as their host agency for staffing and administrative matters, one of which is the maintenance and implementation of this PIP.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

Where to Direct Inquiries: All questions and comments regarding access to WestCOG, SWRMPO and HVMPO may be directed to Nicole Sullivan, phone at 475-323-2071, email nsullivan@westcog.org or by surface mail at the letterhead address.

Public Access to Hard Copy Documents: Public access to HVMPO and SWRMPO hard copy transportation documents is available at the WestCOG office 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM Monday through Friday, evenings by appointment, or through direct surface mail.

Public Access to Digital Documents: Public access to HVMPO and SWRMPO digital transportation documents is available at <https://westcog.org/transportation/> Further inquiries can be sent by email to nsullivan@westcog.org.

Public Access to Virtual Engagement: With the continual advancement of technology, and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, public access to virtual engagement opportunities is more important than ever. WestCOG utilizes platforms such as Zoom and telephone dial-in options when necessary and available. More information can be found on the WestCOG [website](#) on how to navigate and participate virtually.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The vital documents below are points of entry into the MPO federal transportation planning program:

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP): The TIP is four-year financially constrained listing of all federal funded and regionally significant transportation projects. The TIP is multimodal and includes funding for transit, highway, and bicycle/pedestrian projects, among others. The TIP is part of the Statewide TIP (STIP) and is a living document that adjusts to project changes with input from the MPOs.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP): Per federal requirements, each MPO must prepare a MTP every four years which is a prerequisite for federal transportation funding. The MTP covers a 25-year study period and serves as a guide for developing a transportation system that is accessible, safe, and reliable, thereby contributing to a higher quality of life for the region's residents.

Public Involvement Plan (PIP): Pursuant to Title 23 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 450.316, federal transportation planning rules require that WestCOG, SWRMPO and HVMPO maintain the PIP as detailed below. A PIP outlines the procedures and engagement strategies for an agency's public participation.

The following is a list of engagement strategies and procedures to be followed when updating the three plans noted above:

Legal Notices: Concerning pending adoption and to alert citizens and advocacy groups in advance: a legal notice regarding upcoming adoption, public information meeting dates, and overall public comment period, will be placed in major regional newspapers.

For HVMPO, this will be:

- Regional newspaper the Danbury News Times

- Alternative language newspaper La Tribuna

For SWRMPO, this will be:

- Regional newspaper the Stamford Advocate
- Regional newspaper the Norwalk Hour
- Alternate language newspaper La Voz Hispania

Media Releases: Forwarded via email to media outlets serving the SWRMPO and HVMPO areas, and to be included if of interest. The following will be contacted, including but not limited to:

HVMPO: New Fairfield Citizen News, Litchfield County Times, Greater New Milford Spectrum, Newtown Bee, Ridgefield Press

SWRMPO: Darien Times, Darien Daily Voice, New Canaan Daily Voice, Westport Minuteman, Westport News, Westport Daily Voice, Wilton Villager

Public Information Meetings: Public information meetings will be held during the public comment period. SWRMPO and HVMPO will advertise the public information meeting dates within legal notices defining the public comment period. Notices to the public regarding public meeting and hearings will also be posted to the WestCOG web site and social media platforms.

TAG Review and MPO/COG Approval: The WestCOG Technical Advisory Group (TAG) will review draft documents and provide comment and recommendations to HVMPO and SWRMPO before potential endorsement. The MPOs will then vote to endorse the documents.

Summary of Public Comments: When written or oral comments are received as a result of the public involvement process, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of each comment shall be made part of the final document.

In addition, all air quality conformity report comments from the public will be incorporated into the transmission to CTDOT and made part of the final document.

Changes After Review of Draft: If the final TIP, MTP, or PIP either differs significantly from the ones which were first made available for public comment, or if they raise new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen, an additional opportunity for public comment will be made available.

Public Comment Period:

TIP & MTP – Minimum of 30 days. The 30 days will be scheduled to be completed prior to the date of SWRMPO or HVMPO voting as to approval or disapproval of these documents.

PIP – Within federal law Title 23, Code of Federal Regulations 450.316, is the statement that “a minimum public comment period of 45 calendar days shall be provided before the initial or revised participation plan is adopted by the MPO.”

Other Studies and Plans – Public engagement needs will be considered during the scoping of the study or plan.

EVALUATION

WestCOG monitors the available metrics for our outreach platforms and opportunities, such as:

- The WestCOG Newsletter
- Workshops and meetings
- Legal notices
- Media releases
- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Youtube

Metrics provided through the platforms noted above help WestCOG to understand and determine the effectiveness of its public outreach. Newspaper postings in Spanish and Portuguese, as well as translated vital documents assist WestCOG in reaching Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations, as federally defined. Further information can be found in the WestCOG [Language Assistance Plan](#). The plan outlines how LEP populations are determined and the methods WestCOG uses to provide language support. More information on LEP, Title VI, and Environmental Justice can be found on the WestCOG [website](#).

Social media platforms have assisted WestCOG in tailoring its outreach on a per project basis. While effective public engagement is an evolving process, data evaluation is an efficient tool in determining the impact of public outreach strategies.

The PIP will be reviewed periodically to assess the effectiveness of the public engagement strategies noted. At a minimum, these policies will be reviewed when the SWRMPO and HVMPO MTPs and TIPs are updated, that schedule determined by federal rules.