

WCEDD ANNUAL REPORT

FY2021 - 2022



For Reporting Period July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022



WCEDD FY 2021-2022 Annual Report

Reporting Period July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022

This Progress Report tracks activities according to the following six WestCOG 2017 CEDS goals:

1. Foster Regional Planning and Cooperation
2. Develop an Improved Business Climate
3. Cultivate Support for a Diverse Workforce
4. Improve and Maintain Transportation and Public Infrastructure
5. Foster A More Sustainable and Resilient Region
6. Cultivate a Positive Regional Identity

Questions regarding the development of this report, or items within can be made directly to:
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WCEDD Activity List

Regular Occurring Activities during the Reporting Period

- Western Connecticut Economic Development District (WCEDD) meetings were held quarterly on a regular basis.
 - July 15, 2021
 - November 10, 2021
 - January 13, 2021
 - April 14, 2022
- Activities throughout the year were tracked.
- Staff activities supporting the CEDS were detailed in WestCOG's Annual Reports, which were circulated to all WestCOG officials, member communities and made available to the public on WestCOG's website.
- Staff interacted with EDA's regional representative on an as-needed basis.

Brownfields Remediation-EPA Brownfields Technical Support

Goals 2.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1

WestCOG staff, working within the CT Brownfield Initiative Program, explored opportunities to develop brownfield inventories for communities within the district and to develop an overall strategy for addressing brownfields within the district. Identification that the BAR grant would be the likely approach to receive funding to perform this work.

CARES Act Recovery Assistance Grant

Goals 5.2

Per the State of Connecticut's consolidated grant application for statewide long-term recovery coordination, resiliency planning, business retention, and business assistance, WestCOG proposed to be an implementing partner on the Recovery Coordinator portion of the project, working closely with regional Long-Term Recovery Committees. WestCOG has been coordinating with EDA, the State of CT, and partner COGs to receive federal CARES Act Recovery Assistance Funds. WestCOG expects to begin utilizing these funds in 2021. WestCOG expects to use these funds for the following:

1. CEDS Update with Economic Recovery and Resilience Component
2. Disaster Recovery Coordinators
3. Technology and Staff Support

CT Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) LTR 1 Economic Development Subcommittee

Goal 5.2

The subcommittees have completed their charge of developing a list of unmet needs. WestCOG is now coordinating with DEMHS and neighboring COGs to transition into an economic development focused Committee that will be driven by the COGs. The Long Term

Recovery efforts are expected to be closely tied to the CARES Act Funding for the upcoming year.

Hazard Mitigation Planning

Goal 5.3

WestCOG's former agencies (SWRPA and HVCEO) received funding to complete Hazard Mitigation Plans (HMP) for all 18 communities in the WestCOG region. The HMPs are a bridge to potential FEMA Mitigation funds and grant opportunities. HMPs are designed to provide residents, businesses, and emergency responders with information on natural hazards including floods, coastal storms and nor'easters, hurricanes, blizzards/severe winter storms/ice storms, drought, sea level rise, earthquakes, and dam failure. Additionally, the HMPs have an emphasis on providing mitigation goals, objectives, and strategies for each municipality in the region. The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG), along with its member municipalities, is developing its first regional Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) for all 18 communities. The plan is nearing completion and is expected to be finalized and adopted in the next year.

Municipal Stormwater Support Service (MS4)

Goal 5.3

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. To offer an additional resource on which work started this year, WestCOG developed a project to assist municipalities with the daunting task of mapping all their stormwater infrastructure (Permit deadline: July 2020). WestCOG hired a dedicated GIS staffer to assist with this effort. The Analyst has trekked through streams, located outfalls, digitized site plans, and developed a data collection process for municipalities.

Regional Services

Goals 1.1

WestCOG has received funding from OPM to research and implement regional services for its partner communities to create more efficient, cost effective, and improved government services. By leveraging best practices and technology, government can run more efficiently and offer a more attractive place to do business.

Animal Control: WestCOG, in partnership with RFA, LLC is developing a report on the potential for improvements, including inter-municipal or regional sharing, of animal control facilities and/or services in Western Connecticut. See the [Regional Animal Control Website](#) for more details.

Public Safety: WestCOG contracted with Winbourne Consulting LLC to conduct a feasibility study for the sharing/consolidation of selected public safety facilities and/or services. Specifically, Winbourne was tasked with evaluating the potential for cost savings and service improvements.

The towns of New Canaan, Redding, Ridgefield, Weston, and Wilton are all participating in this study. See the [Regional Public Safety Website](#) for more details

Waste Management: WestCOG contracted with Barton & Loguidice Engineers, PLLC to conduct a Regional Waste Management Project. This Project's purpose is to evaluate the feasibility and potential savings of the sharing or consolidation of municipal transfer station facilities and operations in the Western Connecticut Planning Region. See the [Regional Waste Management Website](#) for more details.

UConn Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA) Resilient Connecticut Project

Goal 5.3

WestCOG has been working with CIRCA's Resilient CT Project which is developing a regional vulnerability assessment and climate adaptation planning process for the coastal COGs in CT. This past year WestCOG staff assisted through regional engagement with its member municipalities. The project will identify priority resilience projects, along with substantial planning behind them to facilitate future grant awards. The project is nearing completion and is anticipated to wrap up in the next year. constituents and advisory groups.

Sustainable CT Fellowship

Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Sustainable CT is a voluntary certification program that recognizes communities for their sustainable and resilient efforts. The Program provides a list of best practices (actions) for municipalities to choose from, along with potential funding. A menu of nine categories constituting 55 actions and 1,645 certification points are offered. To be certified, a community must complete at least one action in each of the nine categories and receive a minimum number of points. This program is independently funded and originates in the Institute for Sustainable Energy at Eastern Connecticut State University. WestCOG was assigned two fellows to assist WestCOG member communities to participate in the Sustainable CT program.

USDOT BUILD Grant

Goals 4.1, 4.2

WestCOG was awarded \$400,000 in BUILD funds for preparation of a Value Capture Analysis for the Danbury and New Canaan Branches of the Metro-North Railroad. This award will fund a study to determine whether a regional value capture mechanism such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or a comparable mechanism can be used on a regional, multijurisdictional level to generate funds required to support improvements along the two Branch Lines. These improvements will enhance safety and reduce travel times for passengers and are expected to be beneficial to freight movements. WestCOG has committed an additional \$100,000 in matching funds to this effort. WestCOG has been in coordination with FTA to initiate the project.

WCEDD and EDA Planning Partnership Grant

Goal 1.1

WestCOG's multi-year effort to establish the WCEDD as a federally designated Economic Development District was realized in 2020, with designation announced by the U.S. Economic Development Administration in July. Coordination between EDA and WestCOG took place this year for the WCEDD to potentially join the EDA Planning Partnership Grant. The funds through the partnership grant would enable the WCEDD to support ongoing regional economic planning, pursue additional funding for economic development projects, maintain the CEDS, and to implement the CEDS.

Wireless 5G Study

Goal 4-3

WestCOG developed a coordinated technology strategy on Land Use Planning for Wireless Telecommunications. The project was informed through a variety of subject matter experts from the telecommunications industry, the legal profession, and Senator Blumenthal's office who provided insights into the challenges of managing the anticipated expansion of small wireless facilities across the state of Connecticut and in the eighteen municipalities of Western Connecticut. Specific municipal strategies to guide the development of fifth generation wireless telecommunication services include the adoption of a municipal ordinance, a right of way ordinance, revised zoning regulations, and a municipal licensing strategy. See the [Wireless Taskforce Webpage](#) for more details.

Housing Study

Goal 3-3

At the January 2021 COG meeting, the board instructed WestCOG staff to develop a Regional Affordable Housing Plan that municipalities can adopt to satisfy their statutory requirements for 8-30j. The plan is being written with a focus on regionally addressing affordable housing with annexes for each municipality that include municipal specific data and specific strategies that the town will use to increase affordable housing. Staff have been researching and completing the regional level analysis over the spring and summer and will hold a workshop at the September 14th Planners' Lunch. The plan is projected to be completed in the spring of 2022 for a June 1 adoption deadline.

Commuting Patterns Web Map

Goals 1-1, 1-2, 4-2

A commuting patterns web map was created to illustrate broad dynamics in where residents choose to live and work within the WestCOG region. The data used in this application was acquired from the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program of the United States Census Bureau and represents the most recently available data within this product (2018). Workers commuting patterns provides context for transportation and economic planning decisions. See the [Commuting Patterns Web Map](#) to explore.

Transit Lot Viewer

Goals 1-1, 1-2, 4-1

WestCOG staff have recently begun collecting quarterly usage data for commuter parking lots across the region. This data is now available to view, explore, and download through the WestCOG Commuter Lot Explorer, a web dashboard hosted on the WestCOG website. This resource will be continually updated as new data is collected. The collection of transit lot usage provides insight on existing transit activity within the region and can inform economic decisions. See the [Transit Lot Viewer App](#) to explore.

Rt 37 Study

Goals 4-1

WestCOG, in collaboration with the City of Danbury and Town of New Fairfield, is developing the Danbury and New Fairfield Corridor Study for Route 37 between I-84 Exit 6 in Danbury to 0.2 mile north of Route 39 in New Fairfield.

The major objectives of this study were to discover solutions to alleviate traffic congestion levels, improve pedestrian mobility, and to promote healthy and environmentally friendly modes of transportation.

While emphasizing the enhancement of capacity, safety, and multi-modal options along Route 37, the study also considered Smart Growth planning, more livable, economically sustainable communities, and Complete Streets.

See the [Danbury and New Fairfield Route 37 Corridor Study](#) for more details.

Regional Transportation Safety Study

Goals 4-1

This plan will serve as a road map and strategy to help the Western Connecticut Region and its 18 municipalities collaborate with the State in reducing injury and fatal crashes. It will also serve to increase safety awareness and allow the member towns, cities, and the region to focus on their transportation safety issues. Enhancing safety enhances pedestrian access an important factor to improve economic development within disadvantaged town centers. Access the [Regional Transportation Study](#) to explore in detail.

Bike Plan

Goals 4-1

WestCOG is developing a region wide bike plan to provide recommendations for enhanced bike access and networking. Enhancing bicycle routing can enhance economic activity by providing more transportation options especially those without access to a vehicle. Additionally, bicycle routing is often a source of economic development, as riders are likely to spend money in the areas they ride through.

LOTICIP

Goals 4-1

LOTCHIP provides state funding for a variety of municipal transportation capital improvements, including bridge rehabilitation and replacement; road reconstruction; intersection improvements; traffic signals; streetscapes; sidewalks; multi-use trails; and pedestrian bridges. The program is administered cooperatively by the Connecticut DOT and COGs.

While many of these projects assist with the general needs of transportation infrastructure (an important feature in its own right) some projects are more focused on economic development with efforts to improve streetscapes, downtowns, and TODs. This year Brookfield and Norwalk have submitted applications for projects to restore downtowns and commercial districts.

5310 Solicitation

Goals 4-1

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5310 Program intends to enhance mobility for seniors and persons with disabilities by providing funds for programs that serve the special needs of transit-dependent populations beyond traditional public transportation and paratransit. Since 1975, the state of Connecticut has received annual FTA Section 5310 funds for transportation of seniors and individuals with disabilities. WestCOG has assisted with the administration of this program, which helps enhance transit services providing better access for employment and economic activity.