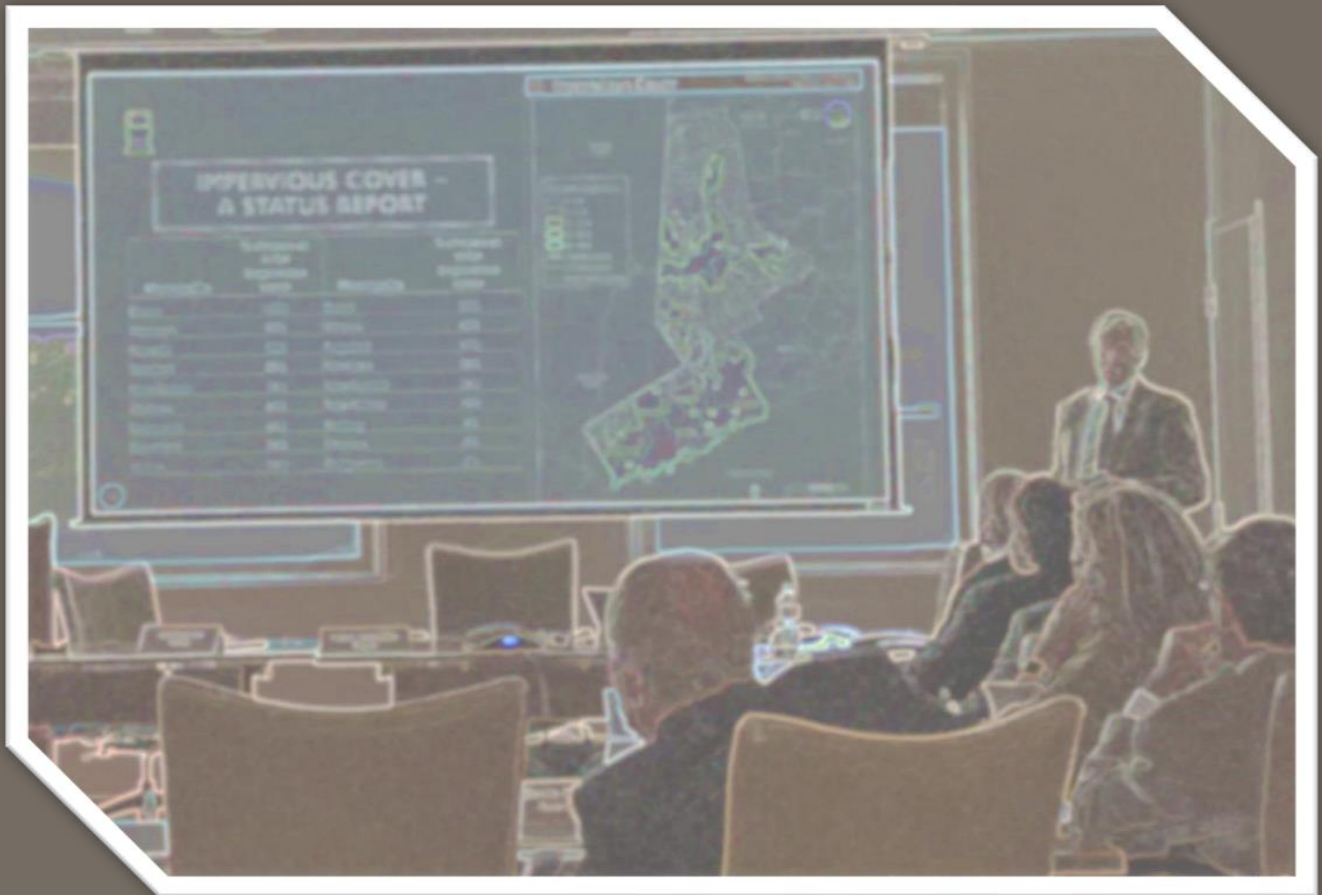


# Public Involvement Plan (PIP)



## 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 the 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 the *Title VI Compliance, Limited English Proficiency, & Environmental Justice Plan* and this *Public Involvement Plan* have interrelated goals and practices. In addition to the PIP, the aforementioned plan can be found on the [WestCOG website](#) for reference. *The Language Assistance Plan* is a subset of Title VI and can be found separately on the [WestCOG website](#). The PIP was adopted on December 15, 2022 and amended on September 21, 2023 by the WestCOG board.

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 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 communities that comprise 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 WestCOG, phone at 475-323-2060, email [help@westcog.org](mailto:help@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 [help@westcog.org](mailto:help@westcog.org).

**Public Access to Meetings:** Times, locations, accessibility, and convenience will be accounted for in the scheduling of meetings. This includes consideration of public involvement, as well as virtual and hybrid options.

**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

During the scoping process of plans and studies, WestCOG identifies opportunities for outreach to those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services. Title VI, Limited English Proficiency, and Environmental Justice is considered as part of the scoping process. Furthermore, effective engagement with traditionally underserved communities is outlined. The scoping process also includes identification of outreach needed for stakeholders and community groups. WestCOG considers alternative formats and technology as needed. 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:*

**Visualization Techniques:** Maps, graphics, and other visualization techniques will be provided, as appropriate, for the MTP, TIP, as well as other studies and plans.

**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
- Alternative language newspaper La Voz Hispania

**Media Releases:** Forwarded via email to local media outlets serving the SWRMPO and HVMPO areas, and to be included if of interest. The following may 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. WestCOG will advertise the public information meeting dates within legal notices defining the public comment period. Notice to the public 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 comments and recommendations to the HVMPO, SWRMPO, and/or COG before potential endorsement. The board 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 comments 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
- The WestCOG website
- 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, Environmental Justice, and language assistance 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 is determined by federal rules.

## **Public Involvement Plan (PIP), Amended September 2023**

### **Summary of Public Comments**

As host to the Housatonic Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (HVMPO) and South Western Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (SWRMPO), the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) opened a 45 day public comment period to amend the Public Involvement Plan (PIP). Amendments made include but are not limited to:

- Description of visualization techniques
- Updated list of outreach platforms
- Updated description of public access to meetings
- Updated description of the scoping process for plans and studies

Public comments on the amended PIP were accepted from August 1, 2023 until 12:00pm on September 15, 2023. WestCOG received 1 public comment during the 45-day comment period:

“Your public involvement plan(PIP) is pretty good, but I would like to see more ‘right tech’ reachout-which might include print outs in public places-like libraries and town halls. The transportation plan, for instance, is pretty onerous to tackle on line, on a monitor(IMO), for the average resident.

Also, while more ambitious, it would be nice to see educational outreach to public schools. The topics I see at the monthly meetings seem to be very relevant, and nicely complementary, in a localized actualization, to things taught in science classes. A field trip, by a class, to one of the COG/MPO meetings might be something to think about. I would have liked to witness one of these meetings as a high school student. It would have a revelation for me from a science and civics standpoint.

So: in summary, lets try to complement the digital with 3D outreach where there might be clear gains in public participation-which seems to be too low from what I am seeing. These mentioned approaches might have less competition for attention-than online approaches.”