Western Connecticut

COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

















ANNUAL REPORT

Western Connecticut COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS



Annual Report - Fiscal Year 2025

Western Connecticut Council of Governments

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Requirements for the Annual Report per CGS §4-66r:

- (1) Summarize the expenditure of such grant funds. [See Section IX.]
- (2) Describe any regional program, project or initiative currently provided or planned by the council. [See Sections II through VII.]
- (3) Review the performance of any existing regional program, project or initiative relative to its initial goals and objectives. [See Section I.]
- (4) Analyze the existing services provided by member municipalities or by the state that, in the opinion of the council, could be more effectively or efficiently provided on a regional basis. [See Section I.]
- (5) Provide recommendations for legislative action concerning potential impediments to the regionalization of services. [See Section VIII.]

I. WestCOG in Fiscal Year 2025

The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) is a Council of Governments (COGs). A COG is a regional association consisting of the chief elected officials (mayors and first selectmen) of the municipalities in a planning region. A COG serves as a forum for local governments to coordinate and cooperate and to interface as a region with federal and state agencies.

Under state law, WestCOG may provide a range of services. At the direction of its board, and funding permitting, these include joint provision of any local government service as well as participation in any grant or program that are available to county governments.

Members

The eighteen-member municipalities of WestCOG are home to 620,550 residents, making the Region the second most populous in Connecticut. (Source: 2020 census redistricting data)

Municipality	Chief Elected Official
Bethel	Dan Carter, Vice Chair
Bridgewater	Curtis Read
Brookfield	Steve Dunn, Member at Large
Danbury	Roberto Alves
Darien	Jon Zagrodzky, Treasurer
Greenwich	Fred Camillo
New Canaan	Dionna Carlson
New Fairfield	Melissa Lindsey
New Milford	Peter Bass
Newtown	Jeff Capeci
Norwalk	Harry Rilling
Redding	Julia Pemberton, Secretary
Ridgefield	Rudy Marconi, Chair
Sherman	Don Lowe
Stamford	Caroline Simmons
Weston	Samantha Nestor
Westport	Jennifer Tooker
Wilton	Toni Boucher, Member at Large



Staff

WestCOG had a staff of twenty-four persons, including fifteen program employees and nine seasonal workers, in fiscal year (FY) 2025:

Title Name		
	Name	
Program Staff	Fuencia D. Diakawing	
Executive Director	Francis R. Pickering	
Deputy Director	Michael Towle	
Finance Manager	Victoria Ricks	
Office Manager	Cricket Carpenter	
Transportation Director	Kristin Hadjstylianos	
Senior Project Manager	Kevin Mahoney	
Senior Project Manager	Charles Vidich	
Project Manager	Betsy Paynter	
Project Manager	Jaclyn Reelick	
Principal Planner	Todd Fontanella	
Senior Planner	Kristin Floberg	
Senior Planner	Mike Wilson	
Associate Planner	Amal Malik	
Senior Data Scientist	Nick Trabka	
Data Scientist	Tucker Beckett	
Temporary Staff		
Planning Aide	Garrett Reed	
Planning Aide	Elizabeth Falk	
Planning Aide	Demetre Coles	
Sustainable CT Fellow 2024	Ella Burns-DeMello	
Sustainable CT Fellow 2024	Dylan Steer	
Sustainable CT Fellow 2025	Maya Aviles	
Sustainable CT Fellow 2025	Sreya Mothukuri	
Princeton Intern 2024	Adem Aricanli	

Performance of existing regional programs, projects, or initiatives

WestCOG's regional service efforts have been well received, with no adverse comments during the FY. All current projects are on track and, barring unforeseen disruptions, are expected to meet targets. Program and project descriptions are given in this document.

Programmatic Challenges

The primary challenge to COG programs today is volatility at the federal level. Rapid executive actions, reversals, and shifting guidance have created instability in the programs on which Connecticut and its municipalities depend. Pauses, rescissions, and freezes—sometimes overturned or modified by the courts—have disrupted schedules, delayed initiatives, and complicated daily coordination.

COGs are not immune to these winds; our own work is shaped by the same turbulence that affects our cities and towns. Yet this is also where we add the most value. WestCOG helps our members navigate shifting policies and priorities, ensuring continuity of service when higher levels of government are in flux. Acting as the connective tissue between local, state, and federal government, we

interpret evolving directives, coordinate regional responses, and keep projects moving forward. In this way, WestCOG both shares in the challenge and provides the partnership needed for the region to advance together.

Opportunities for service provision on a regional basis

WestCOG provides and continues to explore regional services. Services that are in progress are those which are actively being implemented or studied. Those that are "of Interest" have been identified by the COG but not yet initiated or studied. A list of these services is provided followed by descriptions provided in this report.

Current Regional Services¹

- **Policy Priorities**
- Land Use Commissioner Training
- Regional Data Collection
- **Brownfield Services**
- Flood Mitigation Assistance
- Map Viewer
- Data Science
- Photo Inventory

In-progress Regional Services 1 >>

- Municipal ADA Plans
- Sewer Feasibility Study
- Regional Waste Management
- Regional Firearm Training Facility
- Regional Agriculture Viability Study
- Regional Parcel CAMA Improvement
- Digital Land Records

Regional services of Interest

- Local Transportation Project Planning/Development
- Regional Grant Preparation and Management
- Regional IT/IS Platforms
- Regional Cybersecurity
- Municipal Modernization
- Procurement Practices
- Stormwater Permit Services

Program Tags

Along with descriptions of each service, project, or initiative several tags are utilized to denote the status of the project.

- Denotes a Regional Service
- Denotes the project is in development or being studied.
- Denotes the project is completed or active.
- Denotes that a resource was provided, followed by a link.

II. Regional Planning

Policy Priorities **V**



WestCOG coordinates with its member to identify regional priorities and develop a policy agenda. WestCOG also provides input on matters of interest, including proposed legislation, during the year. This service is updated and maintained annually.

Policy Priorities Webpage

Land Use Referrals

Proposed changes to local zoning regulations and maps, subdivision ordinances, and Plans of Conservation and Development ("referrals"), are evaluated by WestCOG for consistency with the regional Plan of Conservation and Development and to avoid conflicts among municipalities. WestCOG responded to 94 referrals this year.

Land Use Commissioner Trainings

Public Act 21-29 established that planning, zoning, combined planning and zoning, and zoning board of appeals members complete at least four hours of training every four years or each term if the term is longer than four years. WestCOG held several trainings and hosts recordings for future use on its website. New training topics this year included:

- Building and Neighborhood Design
- The Special Permit: How it Works, Why and Where it is Ap-
- Regional Agriculture Viability Study
- Special Zoning Districts
- Backyard Chickens: Zoning Strategies for Keeping Chickens and Roosters

Regional Agriculture Viability Study

WestCOG was awarded a grant by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture to study the challenges and opportunities facing current and future farmers in the Region. A goal was to develop strategies for public and private stakeholders to support, expand, and establish farming practices in the Region.

WestCOG worked with Agritecture, LLC. to complete the work for this project. A Study Advisory Committee was assembled representing farmers, planners, economic development, land trust, and local chief elected officials to oversee the project development. A survey of farmers and non-farmers of the region was conducted with over 300 responses. Farmers and stakeholders were interviewed. The study found the region is primed for growth in the agritourism sector and other higher margin goods. The study concluded in January 2025 with a final report that outlined municipal and regional recommendations to facilitate more agriculture in the region.

Regional Agriculture Viability Study

¹ Regarding OPM review, a gear symbol is provided to denote projects WestCOG views as Regional Services. Under each planning topical area, Regional Services have been front loaded for reference.

Letters of Support

WestCOG issues letters of support or letters of consistency for municipal, nonprofit, and private organizations for grant applications that are in alignment with COG goals. In FY2025, WestCOG issued 17 letters of support and consistency.

III. Transportation Planning

Municipal ADA Plans D 🗱

WestCOG is working to improve the accessibility of municipal buildings, facilities, and programs to people with disabilities through the completion of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plans for all member municipalities. WestCOG has retained consulting firm WT Group to work with each participating municipality; tasks include inspections of municipal facilities, review of programs and policies, plan preparation and community engagement. Site visits in Darien, New Milford, Norwalk, Redding, Stamford, Weston, Westport and Wilton occurred in the fall of 2024 and spring of 2025. In addition to these visits, the project includes a robust program of stakeholder involvement. The output of the project will be a formal Transition Plan for each municipality with recommended improvements, estimated costs, and schedule and implementation responsibility. Draft final reports were in preparation for Darien, New Milford, Norwalk and Redding in FY 2025. The WestCOG Municipal ADA Transition Plan Project serves as a model for achieving economies of scale and serving the public through regional coordination. The project is expected to be completed in December 2026.

Metropolitan planning, including MTP and TIP 🔽

WestCOG hosts two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), which are federally mandated, designated and funded transportation policy-making organizations. These MPOs together comprise the WestCOG board, in addition to transit representatives, the COG Executive Director, and the Connecticut Department of Transportation. MPO designations provide access to federal funds, both formula-based and discretionary grants. To access these funds, an MPO must develop and maintain a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The two MPOs functionally operate as one region, with joint and concurrent meetings and shared documents. The federal FY2025-2028 TIPs for both MPOs were endorsed on April 18, 2024. The TIPs for Western Connecticut are programmed to deliver over \$3.2 billion in transportation investment during the federal FY2025-2028 period across the region. The federal 2023-2050 MTPs (formerly known as the Long-Range Transportation Plans) were endorsed on March 16, 2023. The MTPs purpose is to identify what investments and strategies are needed to improve and balance mobility within the region.

WestCOG also plays a role in identifying and selecting projects under federal and state programs. Staff have provided technical support in the solicitations for FTA Section 5310 applications, Matching Grant Program, and corridor study applications.

Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

WestCOG's TAG comprises municipal planners, engineers, public works officials, transit district representatives, and COG staff. The TAG collaboratively reviews and evaluates proposals, making recommendations to WestCOG. Examples of recent TAG initiatives include prioritizations for federal and state funded project solicitations, TIP project amendments, transportation performance measures, ADA Transition Plans, TIP and regional efficiencies, transportation performance management, TIP amendments, and other important regional efforts.

LOTCIP and Regional Engineer

The Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTCIP) provides funding for projects on roads throughout the region. 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, WestCOG received over \$160 million in LOTCIP funding (state FY14-27). WestCOG has committed to funding 48 projects that are in various stages of project development, ranging from design to completion.

Active Transportation Microgrants Program

WestCOG staff solicited for projects through CTDOT's Active Transportation Microgrants Program. The program funds non-infrastructure projects up to \$5,000 that support walking, biking, and rolling in Connecticut. Fourteen eligible organizations have applied and received funds in the past two quarters. The program has funded safety vests for police officers to hand out to pedestrians; pedestrian and bicycle safety workshops; purchases of bicycles for special-needs students; bicycle maintenance supplies and workshops, etc. The program continues to see increased interest quarter after quarter.

Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

WestCOG, in coordination with CTDOT and FHWA, solicited projects to be funded through the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside. The Program is intended to advance smaller-scale transportation projects such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities; construction of turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas; recreational trails; and safe routes to school.

Staff reviewed seven proposals across the Bridgeport-Stamford Transportation Management Area (TMA), provided recommended priority rankings, met with TMA partners, provided comments on the applications, and submitted them to CTDOT in August 2024.

Two proposals were submitted in the Danbury Urbanized Area. WestCOG applied, in coordination with NVCOG, for an East West Trail Study that would study an alignment that would connect the Empire State Trail at the Danbury/New York border with the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail.

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.

WestCOG conducted a qualifications-based procurement for municipal "on call" assignments and released a Task Based Transportation Engineering Services - Municipal Guide, which is available on the COG's web site. This process allows municipalities to draw from a pool of regionally prequalified consultants for transportation engineering services, providing an option to save time and expense in contracting.

Congestion Management

A Congestion Management Process (CMP) is required of any federally designated Transportation Management Area (TMA). Areas of both Metropolitan Planning Organizations fall in the Bridgeport-Stamford Transportation Management Area. WestCOG, along with TMA partners, cooperatively updated a Congestion Management Process for 2023 that is consistent with guidance from FHWA and was done concurrently with the development of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. In coordination with TMA partners, a Monitoring Report is developed each year to review congestion data and evaluate progress on congestion reduction strategies.

Congestion Management Process and Monitoring Reports

Congestion Reduction Study | >>

WestCOG is conducting a study to identify the most congested locations on surface streets (non-freeways) and to evaluate potential mitigation projects that can be initiated and advanced either by municipalities or CTDOT. In coordination with the municipalities, project concepts have been developed to reduce congestion in Danbury, New Milford, Newtown, Stamford, Westport, and Wilton.

Traffic Calming and Complete Streets Best Practices Toolbox

This project will result in development of a Toolbox of planning principles and precepts for residential streets and local roads that reflect best practices. The Toolbox will apply to lower-speed (less than 40 mph) roads, streets functionally classified as local and will be based on consideration of safety and mobility of all users (motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, emergency responders) as well as environmental sustainability, economy of construction and maintenance, community cohesion, land use and utility accommodation. Thus, the Toolbox will reflect and be consistent with principles and recommendations for Complete Streets.

Consulting firm Toole Design Group (TDG) has been engaged to facilitate the process of developing the Toolbox. Tasks completed in FY 2025 include preparation of a report on existing practice in the WestCOG region and convening two focus groups of diverse road users to discuss perspectives and objectives. A report on best practices was subsequently completed and will be reviewed by the

Project Advisory Committee. The study began in September 2024 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2025.

Alternatively Fueled Vehicles 2025 Outlook



In 2017, WestCOG released its first Electric Vehicle Study. That study utilized data from the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management, the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles, and an in-house literature review. Its goals were to:

- Synthesize background information on the electric vehicle (EV) market and usage patterns from a literature review,
- Provide baseline information on the use of EVs and related charging station locations for WestCOG's eighteen municipalities, and
- Identify potential infrastructure gaps and policy recommendations to increase the use of EVs.

WestCOG released the 2025 Outlook to inform its chief elected officials and staff of the current environment of electric vehicles and how it may pertain to their municipalities. The Outlook is intended to inform them of decision-making processes. It can also serve as a resource for the region's residents and businesses. The content is broader than in 2017 and covers EV policies, manufacturing, policy/planning, performance, and a wide range of important considerations for decision-making. More than ever, electric vehicles are being developed, marketed, and consumed based upon assumptions of:

- Benefits to the environment
- Performance characteristics
- Competitive life-cycle costs
- Suitability for transporting people, freight, and for other purposes (i.e., fleets, municipal use, public safety)

Also, the Outlook highlights EV risks and challenges that are relevant to municipalities, the utility and transportation industries, and consumers.



🛖 AFV 2025 Outlook

Regional Transit Study

USDOT awarded WestCOG a \$1 million grant under the Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods (RCN) program to undertake a WestCOG regional study of public transportation services, which is now anticipated to begin in FY 2026. This study will cover services operated by CTtransit, HARTransit, and Norwalk Transit District and is intended to create or enhance coordination between these and connecting systems. Schedules, fare policies and operational issues will be assessed, and connections to Metro-North Railroad services will also be examined. During FY 2025, staff met with the Federal Transit Administration and with CTDOT to address grant administration tasks.

Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Grant Award



In December 2023, USDOT awarded WestCOG approximately \$3.9 million in federal funds through the SS4A program. The funding will be used to implement approximately 90 small-scale safety projects across the Region and include:

- Traffic Signal Retroreflective Backplates
- Installation of Dynamic Speed Feedback Signs
- Adding or Replacing Signage
- High Visibility Crosswalks
- Restriping Crosswalks
- Striping Edge Lines
- Adding or Restriping Pavement Marking

These projects were identified in the WestCOG Regional Transportation Safety Plan (RTSP), which was endorsed in June 2021. The purpose of the RTSP is to reduce fatalities and injuries by outlining effective safety measures to reduce potential future crashes.

The Grant Agreement for this project is currently under final preexecution review by the Federal Highway Administration.



Regional Transportation Safety Plan

Trail Planning and Technical Support D

WestCOG has been inventorying and collecting data on trails and their use in the region. The data will be analyzed, and plans for trail connections between communities, public facilities, and parks and open space will be developed. Technical assistance is provided to municipalities and land trusts to determine trail alignments, grants, trail enhancements, and feasibility of multiuse trails. WestCOG communicates and coordinates with CTDOT, CT Trail Census, and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection on issues regarding trails in the region.

Transportation Advisory Committees

WestCOG actively participates in numerous transportation advisory committees, where members share insight and feedback on statewide planning efforts and local projects. This past year, WestCOG has supported:

- Active Transportation Steering Committee
- Connecticut Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board
- Connecticut Association for Community Transportation
- Danbury I-84 Project Advisory Committee
- I-95 Stamford Planning and Environment Linkages Project Advisory Committee
- I-95 Greenwich Planning and Environmental Linkages Project Advisory Committee
- Merritt Parkway Advisory Committee
- Metropolitan Area Planning Forum
- Multi-State Freight Working Group
- Multi-State Resiliency Working Group
- Norwalk 7/15 Interchange Project Advisory Committee

- Safety Circuit Rider Advisory Committee
- Strategic Highway Safety Plan Steering Committee

Western CT Trail Project 🔀

In 2023, the United States Department of Transportation awarded \$4,528,000 for the Western Connecticut Regional Trail Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Project through the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program covering 80 percent of the total project cost (\$5,660,000). The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection awarded \$566,000 in June 2024 through the Connecticut Recreational Trails Program covering 10 percent of the total project. The project will complete planning and engineering work for numerous sections of an approximately 55-mile multi-use trail between Norwalk, Wilton, Redding, Ridgefield, Danbury Brookfield, and New Milford. Once complete, this will connect the Norwalk River Valley Trail to the Still River Greenway, and the New Milford River Trail. An extension westward to the Maybrook Trail in New York State is also planned. The trail system will directly benefit WestCOG communities connecting urban and rural areas, shorelands and forest, and pedestrian and bicycle transportation to parks, schools, and community centers. The project will serve as a major catalyst for economic development in Western Connecticut, both by facilitating tourism and also by connecting underserved communities to employment opportunities. WestCOG opened a solicitation to select a consultant in March 2025, interviewed the highest ranked firms, and is currently in negotiations with the selected firm.

Rail Improvements - Value Capture 🔽

The United States Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Transportation Discretionary Grant Program was a unique opportunity for the USDOT to invest in road, rail, transit, and port projects that promise to achieve national objectives. The BUILD program enabled USDOT to use a rigorous merit-based process to select projects with exceptional benefits. WestCOG was awarded an USDOT federal FY21 BUILD grant to conduct a Danbury and New Canaan Branch Value Capture Feasibility Study. The study investigated the potential of using alternative funding mechanisms such as value capture as a tool to pay for infrastructure improvements on the branch lines, including potential electrification and extension of the Danbury Branch northward to Brookfield and New Milford, which has been a longstanding regional goal. Staff procured a consultant team comprising AECOM, Fitzgerald & Halliday and Goman+York and commenced work on the Study in Spring 2023; the study was completed in February 2025. Staff presented an overview of the Study at the national AMPO conference in September 2025.

Rail Improvements - Noise Pollution Abatement Feasibility Study

Following CTDOT approval, WestCOG hired SRF Consulting Group and began work on the New Canaan Branch Noise Pollution Abatement Feasibility Study. SRF is assisting with this three-municipality effort (Stamford, New Canaan and Darien) This study is analyzing

existing rail line and grade crossing conditions, determining what infrastructure improvements may be required at specific grade crossings at which trains currently must sound their horns, and identifying where it would be feasible to implement quiet zones in the vicinity of these crossings. If implemented, residents and other sensitive receptors (churches, schools, medical facilities) in the vicinity of the Branch would potentially benefit. This study is the next step following a meeting on train horn noise held in Stamford by State Representative Matt Blumenthal in January 2020 which was attended by the CTDOT Commissioner and other area legislators, and residents who worked together to organize the event. Many members of the public attended this event and shared their concerns for disruptions to their quality of life due to train horns. The study was completed in October 2024 following a public meeting; subsequent meetings were held in January and March 2025 by CT legislators with WestCOG participation. WestCOG is currently working with CTDOT to plan for a Phase II effort, which if approved by CTDOT may get underway in winter 2025-2026.

Norwalk US Route 1 Corridor Master Plan Study

The study focuses on the 2.9-mile-long section of Route 1 between West Norwalk Road/Darien town line to Belden Avenue/Spring Hill Avenue. The study will provide a comprehensive transportation and land-use plan that identifies short-term strategies for quick implementation that will improve mobility, safety, and accessibility for all users and address all modes of transportation utilized within the corridor. Additionally, large-scale long-term improvements in the corridor will be identified for the next 25 years or more. This includes a design framework for future land-use in the corridor.

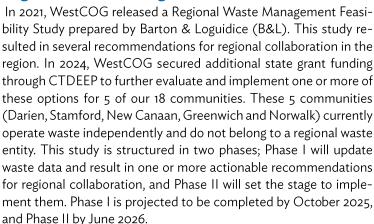
WestCOG and the project consultant FHI Studio now IMEG have conducted three Project Advisory Committee meetings, several public involvement meetings and workshops, and released the existing conditions report in December 2024. Since then, several concepts for the corridor have been vetted and the consultant is finalizing recommendations for a final report by December 2025.

IV. Environmental Planning

Sewer Feasibility Study 🔀 🌣

The Towns of Redding and Ridgefield have periodically expressed the need for increased wastewater collection and treatment in the Branchville section of Ridgefield and the Georgetown section of Redding. One solution frequently mentioned was the feasibility of utilizing the Georgetown WPCF, currently operating well under capacity, to accommodate these needs. Therefore, WestCOG obtained a \$200,000 grant from the USEPA in 2022 to assist the communities in evaluating current wastewater conditions and to plan for increased utilization of the facility. WestCOG selected a qualified consultant to conduct this study in January 2025. The study is projected to be completed by the end of the 2025 calendar year. The study will produce the following deliverables: a market analysis for both communities with corresponding estimated future sewer demand, capacity and improvements evaluation for the Georgetown plant with corresponding cost estimates, a floodplain evaluation, sewer routing and a draft intermunicipal agreement.

Regional Waste Management 🔀 🇱



Regional Waste Management Study

Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG)

WestCOG, in partnership with MetroCOG and NVCOG, is developing Climate Action Plans for their COG member communities. The Climate Action Plans are part of a \$1 million EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG). The process led to the creation of first round Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP) completed in in March 2024. The Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP) is expected in December 2025. The plans will include actions, strategies, and projects to reduce climate pollution at the COG and municipal levels, and in turn can potentially be funded through federal grants. WestCOG has worked with MetroCOG on outreach and the RFQ process for a consultant to draft these plans.

* SW CT Priority Climate Action Plan

Municipal Stormwater Support Service (MS4)

WestCOG provides MS4 compliance support services for interested municipalities in the region. WestCOG coordinates field technicians to map MS4 infrastructure networks within the Region. The data collected is used to create new GIS datasets that will be distributed to these towns.

Sustainable CT

WestCOG provides office space, resources, and professional development for Sustainable CT Fellows each summer. The Fellows work with WestCOG municipalities to register and engage within the Sustainable CT Program which provides recognition for a community's sustainability efforts. Sustainable CT Fellows also provide support for WestCOG-related projects.

V. Economic Development

Brownfield Services



The WestCOG Brownfields Program provides technical support to WestCOG member communities to assess, remediate, and ultimately redevelop brownfields. These efforts will improve public health, encourage economic growth and revitalize blighted properties into community assets. WestCOG has provided technical grant support in FY2025 for New Milford, Redding, Newtown, Stamford, and Westport. WestCOG has also supported private public partnership brownfields as a pass-through applicant in Stamford, Greenwich and Westport.

Additionally, WestCOG is developing the groundwork to offer a Brownfield Assessment Program with an application to EPA, which would offer funds to explore the status of contaminated properties. The program application has initiated along with an inventory of potentially contaminated properties.

Western Connecticut Economic Development District ✓

The Western Connecticut Economic Development District (WCEDD) is a state and federally designated Economic Development District that serves regional economic interests for WestCOG's eighteen member communities. WCEDD meets quarterly to provide economic insight for the COG and to pursue the goals outlined by the *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* (CEDS). An approved and unexpired CEDS is required to qualify regions and municipalities for federal economic development funds.

- ★ WestCOG Economic Plan 2023-2028
- ★ WCEDD Annual Reports

Next-Generation Regional Sector Partnership

In conjunction with the Stamford Partnership, WestCOG developed a partnership of "tech-enabled, data-dependent" businesses in southwestern Connecticut. The partnership serves as a vehicle for businesses in this critical sector to address workforce and other competitive needs as a group, and in conjunction with institutions and organizations active in education, workforce development, and economic development. WestCOG's role in the Next-Generation Regional Sector Partnership informs WCEDD's planning activities.

EDA Planning Partnership Program 🔽

WestCOG's WCEDD was awarded a three-year Planning Partnership grant through the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). The grant will provide annual funding to assist WestCOG in implementing and maintaining its CEDS. As part of the upkeep for this program WestCOG is required to maintain Annual Reports reflecting WCEDD performance. WestCOG has assisted communities with EDA Disaster grant opportunities. In Stamford, WestCOG has supported and helped facilitate a disaster grant application from storm Ida in 2023 to the EDA in relation to the Stamford Canal Wall deterioration. Norwalk has also prepared an application from August 18, 2024, storm disaster declaration to support their reconstruction of the Keeler Book Pump station which supports the business district along the Route 1 corridor. Both applications in development and will be submitted to the EDA.

Regional Affordable Housing Financing Study

WestCOG selected Goman+York to conduct a study of the region's housing market, with the goal of identifying how municipalities

could maximize the creation of units that qualify under CGS §8-30g. The study gave critical insights into the financial viability of various housing typologies and affordability strategies, giving municipalities a viable path forward supporting affordability.

Affordable Housing Finance Study

VI. Public Safety

Through a regional partnership, WestCOG works with the Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS), member communities, and neighboring COGs to prepare and plan for regional emergency response and mitigation. WestCOG falls in two DEMHS planning regions, Region 1 and Region 5.

Regional Firearm Training Facility 🔀 🌼

WestCOG is coordinating the construction of a tactical training facility that will include a fifty-yard firing range. WestCOG has developed designs, specifications, governance models, and cost estimates. Next steps include exploring retrofit or an outdoor solution.

Western Connecticut Regional Firearm Training Facility

Flood Mitigation Services 🛂 🌼

WestCOG operates a Regional Flood Mitigation Assistance Program with the support of a qualified consultant team. The program was established in 2022 and provides technical assistance related to grant application, maintenance, reporting and closeout services for FEMA-funded hazard mitigation and planning projects. Specifically, WestCOG assists communities with pursuing the following FEMA grant programs: Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA), FMA Swift Current, and the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). WestCOG helped achieve a 75% success rate in 2024 receiving selections for 6 of the 8 applications submitted. In 2025, WestCOG successfully submitted 6 grant applications on behalf of two communities and worked with dozens more to determine grant eligibility. Staff continue to field programming inquiries and work with municipalities and residents to pursue these grant opportunities as they arise. Flood Mitigation Webpage

Emergency Support Function 1- Transportation

As part of supporting DEMHS Regions 1 and 5, WestCOG coordinates with NHCOG, NVCOG, and MetroCOG quarterly. Strategies to improve transportation planning issues, related to emergency support functions, are discussed. WestCOG and MetroCOG staff serve as Co-Chairs of ESF1.

VII. Data & Technology

Regional Data Collection Program 🗹 🌼

WestCOG performs a number of data collection services using trained staff, software, and hardware to generate data sets for studies, municipal requests, and reporting requirements. Summaries of the various services are outlined below:

Traffic Cameras. installs temporary traffic cameras that collect up to 50 hours of traffic video for an intersection. Data outputs include turning counts for pedestrians, bicycles, cars and heavy vehicles. This data is used in a wide range of analyses, including level of service (LOS), pedestrian and cyclist, intersection signal timing and capacity, traffic control type and signal coordination.

Radar Counters. WestCOG deploys radar counters to 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 trained WestCOG staff to conduct analyses. WestCOG conducted 266 hours of turning movement counts this year that were used in project design and safety analysis for the municipalities in the region.

Infrared Trail Counters. WestCOG has three trail counting infrared devices and a processing application. Staff have been providing ongoing assistance at the Fairfield Hills Trail in Newtown since February 2020 and at three locations along the Norwalk River Valley Trail in Norwalk since October 2024. Assistance includes data collection and analysis for use in future applications for funding and studies that would improve the heavily used trail. The trail counters can be requested for specific studies by municipalities.

Speed and Volume Radar Devices. WestCOG has two speed and volume radar devices and a processing application. Staff collected and processed data at two locations this year for safety analyses.

Lot Counts. WestCOG also continued conducting quarterly utilization counts for commuter park-and-ride and rail station parking lots across the region. This data was made available to the public through an interactive web application which is regularly updated with new data. WestCOG Commuter Lot Explorer

Drone Imagery. WestCOG has FAA certified drone pilots on staff as well as drone equipment for the use of imagery collection missions. Drone flights are scheduled per request from municipal partners or to provide supportive imagery for grants applications and ongoing initiatives.

Regional Parcel CAMA Improvement 🔀 🌼

WestCOG received a grant from the State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management to assess and improve the baseline of property data in its member municipalities. Parcel geometry and Computer-Aided Mass Appraisal (CAMA) data will be updated to improve recency and the match rate between property records. This project began in 2025 and will continue through December 2026. The final delivery of updated data will coincide with the annual collection of property records in Spring of 2027

Regional Map Viewer 🔽 🌼

WestCOG provides an interactive, online regional GIS web viewer for municipalities and members of the public. The viewer maps property boundaries and its associated data along with a variety of planning layers. Viewer functions include map design, abutter property selection, layering of planning datasets such as zoning, flood

zones, impervious cover, building footprints, tree canopy, and current and historical aerial imagery, query/search tools, as well as a link to assessor property cards. The viewer can stand in for or substitute for a municipal GIS viewer. The viewer is enhanced annually with updated datasets and features.

🜟 <u>WestCOG's Regional Viewer</u>

Data Science 🗹 🌣

WestCOG provides regional web-based analytics, mapping services, technical support, and training for WestCOG member communities as well as for WestCOG's own planning initiatives. Additionally, WestCOG develops and maintains its own regional planning data sets either from scratch or through standardizing municipal/state/federal datasets. Datasets created and maintained at WestCOG include Parcels, Zoning, Wetlands, Land use, Planimetric, Imagery, Canopy, Critical Assets, Building Footprints, Pavement, Intersections.

- ★ Data Downloads Site
- # GIS Data HUB Site
- Data Science Website

Regional Parcel Data 🛂 🌼

Following PA 18-175, WestCOG coordinates with municipalities to collect parcel data and CAMA data in the spring of each year. As many of these datasets are unique to their municipality, a substantial level of effort is required to bring them into a regional format.

Photos of the Region 🗹 🌣

WestCOG maintains a FLICKR account and photo inventory of the region. These photos are heavily leveraged in the drafting of WestCOG documents. The album of photos is made fully available to the public without restriction. Additional photos are added annually. Photos of the Region FLICKR Page

VIII. Recommendations for Legislative Action

In WestCOG's view, the following recommendations would advance service sharing and deliver cost savings.

Procurement Safe Harbor

Problem. When Connecticut municipalities attempt joint purchasing, they face a maze of local charter provisions and purchasing ordinances. Each town has different thresholds for quotes, bids, and RFPs. As a result, a joint bid must be designed to meet the *strictest* requirements of every participant. This adds time, increases administrative costs, and discourages some towns from participating at all. Vendors may express uncertainty about whether awards will be honored uniformly, which depresses competition.

Regional Solution. A statutory "safe harbor" would provide that if a council of governments or a lead municipality runs a procurement in compliance with a uniform standard, all participating municipalities are deemed to have satisfied their own local requirements. Municipalities would retain the choice to opt in or out of each joint bid, but participation would no longer be blocked by mismatched local thresholds.

Legislative Clarification Needed. Amend Title 7 to state that procurements conducted by a COG, or by a lead municipality under an interlocal agreement, in compliance with state competitive bidding standards, shall be valid and binding on all participating municipalities notwithstanding conflicting local provisions.

Impact. This would create legal certainty for vendors and municipalities, expand the use of joint purchasing, and reduce costs without altering municipal autonomy or staffing. A single statutory fix would produce statewide benefits, unlocking more efficient procurement for every COG and town that chooses to use it.

Digital Land Records Modernization (with standardized, machine-readable deeds)

Problem. Connecticut's land records remain paper-based. Deeds are drafted in free-form text without a standard structure, then stored as physical documents or scanned images. Indexing is laborintensive, errors are common, and title searches are slow and inconsistent. Clerks must maintain vaults of fragile paper records. Even in "digital" systems, the legal record is just an image of the paper — not structured data that can be validated, searched, and integrated with other systems.

Regional Solution. A land records platform hosted by a COG or the state would allow municipalities to file deeds and related instruments in a machine-readable standardized schema. The structured record, once validated and digitally signed, would be recognized as the legal original. Clerks remain custodians and continue to certify and issue records, while the platform oversees validation, cybersecurity, and data storage. Human-readable PDFs/images are generated for public access, but the authoritative record is the structured file.

Legislative Clarification Needed.

- Recognize validated, machine-readable deeds as legal originals.
- Direct state agencies, in consultation with clerks, the bar, and title insurers, to adopt a uniform deed schema with mandatory core fields (parties, parcel ID, instrument type, etc.).
- Clarify that regional hosting is consistent with municipal custodianship and that fee revenue remains with the municipalities.
- Establish a cybersecurity baseline and liability protection for municipalities using an approved system.

Impact. Standardized, machine-readable deeds will reduce clerk workloads, cut indexing errors, accelerate title research, and improve fraud detection. Integration with GIS, assessing, permitting, and tax systems becomes seamless. This reform modernizes a centuries-old system while keeping authority local and revenues intact, and scales efficiently as towns opt into a shared platform.

Regional ADA Coordinators

Problem. Federal law requires every municipality to designate an ADA coordinator, but in practice most municipalities assign this title to an existing employee who has no training in accessibility law and may not even be aware they hold the designation. Transition plans are often missing or decades out of date, exposing municipalities to lawsuits and Department of Justice enforcement. Individual towns lack the scale to support a dedicated, knowledgeable ADA officer.

Regional Solution. A COG-based ADA Coordinator could serve as the designated ADA coordinator for each member municipality. The team would update and maintain transition plans, oversee grievance procedures, provide staff training, and advise on accessibility compliance in municipal facilities, services, and programs. Local staff would remain responsible for implementing improvements, but with expert guidance and oversight.

Legislative Clarification Needed. Amend or interpret state law to confirm that municipalities may formally designate a regional employee or contractor as their ADA coordinator under Title II, provided that the designation is recorded by local resolution. This removes any doubt about the legality of a shared ADA coordinator role.

Impact. Municipalities would gain consistent expertise, reduce legal exposure, and better serve residents with disabilities. This is a compliance-driven, risk-mitigation measure that scales efficiently: one or two specialists at the COG can cover multiple towns, providing a service that individual municipalities cannot afford on their own.

Regional Energy Managers

Problem. Energy is one of the largest controllable costs for municipalities, across buildings, schools, and fleets. State and federal programs (utility incentives, IRA funds, vehicle electrification grants) exist but are underused because municipalities lack the staff capacity to apply, benchmark, and manage projects. Each local government often hires its own consultants for energy audits or climate action plans, duplicating costs and effort.

Regional Solution. A Regional Energy Manager, employed or contracted through the COG, would benchmark municipal facilities in ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager, identify efficiency and renewable projects, coordinate incentive applications, and develop fleet transition roadmaps. The manager would function as a technical resource for multiple towns simultaneously, ensuring they capture available incentives and savings.

Legislative Clarification Needed. Clarify in statute and program guidance that councils of governments are eligible applicants and administrators for state and federal energy incentive programs on behalf of their members. This ensures that a COG-based Regional Energy Manager can directly secure and manage funding streams that today go untapped.

Impact. Municipalities save money on energy bills, access previously underutilized grants, and advance state climate and energy goals. By centralizing expertise, towns avoid redundant consultant costs and gain professional support without increasing local head-count. The savings and benefits scale efficiently across multiple municipalities.

IX. Expenditure of Regional Services Grant funds

WestCOG utilizes its Regional Services Grant (RSG) funds in accordance with its approved RSG Spending Plan. State fiscal year 2025 (FY2025) expenditures are summarized in table 1. WestCOG is on track to conduct its RSG Spending Plan for state fiscal year 2026 (FY2026) in the respective fiscal year, assuming no interruptions to funding or process.

Table 1 State FY 2025 Expenditures by Project

Task	Expenditure
Municipal Technical Support	\$50,426.46
Regional Services	\$679,661.65
Comprehensive Planning	\$131,445.14
TOTAL	\$861,533.25

