

WESTCOG TRAFFIC CALMING & COMPLETE STREETS TOOLBOX**Emergency Services Providers & Transportation Focus Group****Thursday, April 3rd**

11:30 AM – 1:00 PM ET

Comstock Community Center

Meeting Room 30

180 School Road, Wilton, CT 06897

Thank you for participating in the WestCOG Traffic Calming and Complete Streets Best Practices Toolbox Focus Group on April 3, 2025. These discussions can help surface insights to be incorporated into the development of the toolbox, such as specific vehicle or operational needs related to the proposed traffic calming and complete streets concepts, and bring together diverse perspectives to discuss project goals, priorities, and the value of the toolbox for improving safety in the region. Notes from the Focus Group and discussions are provided below.

Attendees

WestCOG: Mike Wilson, Kristin Hadjstylianos, Francis Pickering

Toole Design: Carrie Long, Shawna Kitzman

Focus Group Participants: Frank Petise, City of Stamford Transportation Bureau Chief | Philip Cruz, Newtown Police Commissioner | Natalie Griffith, Newtown Human Services | Dave Kullgren, Newtown Police Department | Leonard Penna, Newtown Police Department | David Hartman, Wilton Police Department | Mark Pompano, Newtown Public Schools Safety & Security

Presentation

Introduction

Mike Wilson, Senior Planner of WestCOG, introduced the project to discuss specific concerns and ideas related to transportation engineering, public works, and public safety, and develop a set of best practices, within this Traffic Calming Toolbox effort.

The team will facilitate the focus group discussion, then synthesize and anonymize feedback. The Consultant team will share draft notes, with a call for participants to correct or add additional details.

Each participant introduced themselves and answered the ice breaker to begin thinking about walking, biking, taking transit in addition to driving.

Traffic Calming 101

Carrie Long, the Project Manager from Toole Design, presented a brief 'Traffic Calming 101' slide deck, to provide a baseline of terminology, introduce the factor of speeding on roadway safety, and to narrow the scope focus on local streets with lower volume and lower speeds to create safe spaces for all modes. Self-enforcing roadways, designed to calm traffic, is a common thread.

Roadway Treatment Discussion

Carrie welcomed participants to engage in a discussion of various traffic calming treatments.

Vertical Treatments

Newtown has approximately 600 roadway miles in town, and one street has five speed humps. Emergency vehicles navigate them easily. Wilton has a policy including eight criteria, and the Town highly discourages speed humps due to perceived issues around emergency responders and snowplows. There's one public roadway and several smaller roadways within the Cider Mill School complex with speed humps. Newtown has speed humps, which can present a hazard to motorcycle riders. They generate noise from vehicles, such as landscaping trailers, but are valuable in the right context.

Stamford has quite a few speed humps, mostly installed over 10 years ago. Since roadways without speed humps attract increased traffic, property owners request them from the City, to distribute traffic equitably. However, they are controversial: property owners see their value, but don't want them in front of their property. The City requests petitions from 70% of property owners on a given roadway and conduct due diligence to avoid pushback.

There is municipal appetite for raised crosswalks, to calm traffic and improve driver visibility of pedestrians. The required signage associated with raised crosswalks creates potential pushback, as people dislike visual clutter.

Chicanes and Horizontal Treatments

Private roads are ubiquitous in the region, and they often include unique roadway treatments, varying roadway material (dirt, gravel, pavement), signage, and chicane-type treatments. Many have been developed over time and are not required to comply with federal design standards. Some of these treatments include small, movable fences (removed during the winter to facilitate plowing) or landmark trees or boulders that the residents advocate for; these serve as natural chicanes.

Stamford provides plowing and trash pick-up on private roads, but most jurisdictions do not.

Subdivision developers include ample roadway curvature as a design feature, but the roadways are not necessarily narrow and are not intentionally designed to calm traffic.

Traffic Circles, Roundabouts, and Mini Roundabouts

There is general support for roundabouts. Newtown would like a roundabout in Main Street (Route 25), however, there is a historic flagpole that creates a challenge. The Town conducted studies and will address the flagpole in an upcoming municipal SS4A-funded Safety Action Plan. Wilton stakeholders pushed back on a roundabout concept because they felt it'd be 'too effective' at moving traffic through the area, thereby inducing demand for more traffic and vehicles moving through the area. WestCOG has supported Routes 33 and 53 in planning and concept design.

The region lacks an adequate north-south County connector, and many drivers use rural state routes as the default.

Stamford stakeholders largely object to roundabouts, often referring to them 'rotaries,' which are applicable at larger scales. Design is important, such as splitter islands and pedestrian-friendly amenities. The City also has mini roundabouts. Stamford's first roundabout at Greenwich Avenue and Pulaski in Stamford is completed, and the City hopes the positive impacts (fewer crashes and types of crashes, at lower speeds) build community support. CTDOT feedback regarding mountable roundabouts is to test the largest vehicle to understand potential impacts. Wilton stakeholders often reject roundabout proposals, largely due to misconception.

Mike Wilson noted that CTDOT led a recent training to discuss 10 successful roundabouts within the state and correct misinformation, which was valuable.

Curb Extensions, Bump-Outs, and Pinch Points

Newtown supports physical pinch points. Stamford employs painted bump-outs with flex posts, including quick builds with plastic centerline hardening. Public complaints are regarding difficulty parking and slower speeds (which is the purpose of these design interventions). There is public support to use them as quick builds.

Newtown is very historic, and the community advocates strongly uphold local character. Generally, there is pushback about flashing lights, roadway striping or painting, and standard Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) signage. CTDOT offered to create historic signals on stanchions, but the Borough declined.

New Milford Green is a good example of granite curb use. Stakeholders along Newtown's Route 25 may be interested in aesthetic planters. Stamford Downtown has similar treatment, which they maintain, as well as hanging planters.

Median Treatments

Newtown supports pedestrian safety zones on higher volume streets. Stamford has built a few medians, which serve as gateway treatments. The concern is about the width and long-term viability within the right of way (ROW). Downtown Danbury implemented an extensive 2' wide median that calms traffic.

Lane Reconfiguration

Stamford supports lane reconfiguration but the context matters, whether in residential, downtown, or rural areas. Stamford removed a travel lane on Route 1. Driver education and ample ROW is needed for the Two-Way Left-Turn Lane. There is variation across the state in how roadways are striped. There are studies that indicate edge lines will slow traffic, but double yellow lines can support increased speed due to driver perception. Some property owners believe double yellow lines negatively impact property values. Westport has many single-striped, yellow lined roadways. The group discussed the implications of design standards outlined in the MUTCD.

Focus Group Discussion

Questions in grey were not discussed.

1. Does anything surprise or concern you about the information we have presented?
2. Are there any specific locations, incident types, or behaviors that either of you find especially concerning that are perhaps not captured?
 - a. National design standards do not necessarily apply to the New England, based on roadways founded on historic horse paths.
 - b. There is a need to encourage travel apps (such as Waze) to follow state roads, through education and awareness.
 - c. There is a disparity between older legacy main roads and subdivisions which have newer standards.
 - d. There is an influx of housing in many of the municipalities.
3. What do you believe is the most serious transportation issue in your community?
 - a. I-84 creates significant issues when there's congestion, traffic overflows to backroads. This also happens due to I-95 and the Merritt Parkway.
4. What is the greatest challenge or the most significant barriers in your agency/organization to improving safety on the roads in your community? ...In the region, or more broadly?
 - a. Many affluent stakeholders understand how to leverage their power or influence, are able to organize, and thwart municipal efforts if they don't support them.

5. What makes the WestCOG region unique when it comes to the discussion of traffic calming?
 - a. There is no roadway grid and many village areas.
 - b. Stamford has 'mini-highways' such as Tresser Boulevard or Washington Boulevard. There is a car first mentality. CTDOT has gotten better in recent years in factoring in safety into project planning and design. They are becoming more progressive, but there are some blind spots in CTDOT's evaluation.
 - c. Newtown has been building more sidewalks, stakeholders are for them, even though they are responsible for maintaining. This is based on many older residents, who are vocal, and want a more livable community.
 - d. There should be a committee that works closely with the state. CTDOT controls many of the roadways, therefore, a symbiotic relationship with the state would be beneficial. **Great partners at the state level are welcome!**

6. What treatments or designs have you seen work elsewhere, that you'd love/hate to see in the region?
 - a. Dingle, Ireland – narrow roadways induce traffic calming
 - b. Seattle – default yield at neighborhood intersections of local roads

7. If you have a wish list of street interventions or policies that would be effective in supporting emergency professionals, what would be included? (Or – who is doing this well? Who and where can we learn from?)
 - a. There is local support for RRFBs – state grant occurring now. Wilton stakeholders are supportive. Local roads/mid-block crosswalks. There is also mixed feedback on rumble strips and new technologies.
 - b. Newtown is moving ahead with automatic traffic enforcement ordinance, including speed enforcement and red-light cameras, and proceeding with a preferred vendor who provides a turnkey operation. Wilton assessed but decided to pause, first determining the effectiveness of neighboring towns' programs.
 - c. Focus on education and intervention for newer high school drivers, around school districts. There are many modes active in a small geographic area at school arrival and dismissal.

8. Do you have any specific concerns about the types of roadways and treatments that we've discussed?
9. How can WestCOG and its agencies, specifically through design and operations, best support your work?
10. Any partners or agencies that are especially useful in promoting transportation safety in your community? Any groups or individuals that we should talk to, that we have missed?
11. What *didn't* we ask you today that you expected or would like to talk about?