

WESTCOG TRAFFIC CALMING & COMPLETE STREETS TOOLBOX**Emergency Services Providers & Transportation Focus Group**

Monday June 16th
12:30PM – 2:00 PM ET

Virtual via Zoom

Thank you for participating in the WestCOG Traffic Calming and Complete Streets Best Practices Toolbox Focus Group on June 16, 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, Moctar Fall

Focus Group Participants: James Ferlow (New Milford, Emergency Management, Wetlands Director?), Jim Travers (Norwalk, Director of Transit), Drew Loya (Ridgefield, Fire Marshal), Eric Swenson (Bethel, Public Works Director), Bobby Buch (Darien, Fire Marshal), Derek Broadmeyer (Brookfield, Fire Chief), Rick Schreiner (Director of Transit for NTD), TCA (Unknown/Conference Equipment)

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 anonymized 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, and taking transit in addition to driving.

Traffic Calming 101

Carrie Long presented briefly on 'Traffic Calming 101', 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 Long welcomed participants to engage in a discussion of various traffic calming treatments.

Vertical Treatments (Speed Humps, Raised Crosswalks)

- The City of Norwalk has opted not to implement speed humps due to their adverse effects on emergency response operations and budgetary constraints. Instead, raised crosswalks are utilized as a more practical and cost-effective traffic calming measure that maintains accessibility for first responders.
- Raised crosswalks are also strategically deployed in the Town of New Milford to enhance pedestrian safety, particularly in school zones. These treatments are specifically installed on secondary roads and include bypass provisions to ensure unobstructed access for emergency vehicles, balancing traffic calming objectives with operational needs from emergency services.

Chicanes and Horizontal Treatments

- New Milford's historic road network – originally designed and built for horses and buggies – naturally incorporates curves and horizontal shifts, making chicanes not uncommon.
- Stamford's recent experiences with chicane and shift treatments highlights the need to focus on collecting data prior to and post implementation to evaluate the effectiveness of these treatments. When analyzing Stamford's data from chicanes, there has not been much reduction in speed.
- This linked example from New Zealand demonstrates a comprehensive approach between raised intersections, chicanes and other traffic calming features ([link](#)).

Traffic Circles, Roundabouts, and Mini Roundabouts

- It is possible for roundabouts to be an effective traffic calming infrastructure. In Australia, roundabouts are widely used in place of stop signs to manage traffic and reduce speeds effectively, compared to the US, where roundabouts are more commonly found near highways interchanges and high arterials.
- There is strong support for roundabouts in Norwalk, with aspirations of becoming the “roundabout capital” of Connecticut. The City has identified 15 potential intersections and is currently advancing three installations, citing the effectiveness in roundabouts managing traffic flow well and improving safety. Noted that more work around roundabouts needs to be focused on knowledge sharing and educating people about their benefits, and usage, and further investing in them.
- Concerns were raised regarding mini-roundabouts, particularly their incompatibility with large emergency vehicles and long-wheelbase trucks, which often require mounting the curb to navigate the tight turning radius.
 - *Post-event note – in instances where mini roundabouts present geometric conditions that constrain large vehicles from using the facility, and if designed without mountable surfaces or with vertical elements/signs in the center area, large trucks should be accommodated by allowing left turns.*

Curb Extensions, Bump-Outs, and Pinch Points

- Curb extensions were viewed favorably, with support for their ability to reduce turning speeds at corners, shorten pedestrian crossing distances, and prevent vehicles from obstructing crosswalks or corners with illegal parking. While there may be a learning curve for drivers initially, these treatments are generally regarded as effective and well-received over time.

Median Treatments

- In New Milford, median islands have been incorporated into newer subdivisions, functioning as green spaces and, when designed as sunken features, as stormwater management systems. There is interest and concern in whether regional planning agencies, such as WestCOG, are addressing housing policy implications, particularly regarding on-street parking provisions for multifamily developments.

- It was noted that on-street parking is often impractical for housing developments exceeding 24 units due to its potential to obstruct intersection visibility, compromise pedestrian safety, and interfere with snow removal and other essential services. However, on-street parking can also serve as a useful traffic calming strategy when designed appropriately. Median islands were acknowledged as having both benefits and drawbacks: they can aid in slowing traffic but may also unintentionally create a limited-access highway feel that encourages speeding. In some cases, narrowing the roadway itself may be a more effective solution than expanding the median.
- Brookfield has experienced a surge in multifamily development, including projects with 70 and 92 units on sites with limited capacity. This growth has led to overflow parking on neighboring residential streets and has created significant challenges for emergency vehicle access, particularly for fire services. These issues highlight the need for careful coordination between housing density, parking design, and emergency response access.

Lane Reconfiguration

- Lane reconfiguration is viewed as an effective measure where feasible; it reduces vehicle speeds and improves safety.
- There is concern around the challenges of lane reconfiguration in rural contexts such as New Milford, due to narrow, legacy roadways originally built for horse-drawn traffic. The limited right-of-way makes it difficult to add or reallocate lanes, and in some cases, sidewalk installations have required encroachment onto private property.
- In more urbanized areas, lane reconfiguration can also be implemented strategically to restrict high-risk turning movements and eliminate vehicle conflict points, improving overall traffic operations near destinations like neighborhood markets. ([link](#))

Routing Restriction/Traffic Diversion

- Limiting turning movements and over engineering road systems presents difficulties for drivers, because it is not possible for people to know what to do instead in some cases, e.g. turning left in New Jersey. Drivers are not psychic so if they can make their turn, they will, despite the restrictions. Without clear guidance, intuitive design and signage, this measure can do more harm than good.

Focus Group Discussion

Questions in grey were not discussed.

1. Does anything surprise or concern you about the information we have presented?

- No surprises, roundabouts are prevalent in Vermont, New Hampshire, and across Connecticut, but there should be more emphasis around selecting the appropriate intersection treatment based on context. The toolbox should guide users in choosing the right tool for each intersection redesign.
- Design discussions often overlook low-volume, low-speed streets. Moreover, cul-de-sacs are frequently constructed to more generous standards than connecting main streets, which leads to inefficient land use.
 - There is a broader concern about how to make neighborhood streets safe and functional as play spaces “neighborhood streets safe to play with a basketball in”, especially in areas where the primary purpose is residential access.
- It is important to consider the principles of complete streets, traffic calming should not just default on car-centric solutions and should instead open streets for use by all modes, including pedestrians and cyclists.
 - Traffic calming and complete streets should be hand in hand, promoting complete streets in name is not enough (e.g., Las Vegas promotes complete streets but has 12 lanes for cars)

- Extended medians can pose significant challenges for accessible bus stop placement, potentially limiting safe and convenient access for transit users.
- **Follow up Question: Some communities have more robust transit systems; is there public transit or paratransit (do people use it, where is a bus stop, etc.)**
 - Housatonic Transit carries approximately 600,000–700,000 trips per year, with 50,000–60,000 additional paratransit trips. In Norwalk, ridership is higher, at around 1.5 million trips annually and 75,000 paratransit trips. “Anything that’s good for pedestrians is good for transit.” There are operational needs such as bus turnarounds and pull-over space to avoid obstructing traffic to ensure this works
 - There is limited transit coverage, particularly along Route 202, where service is only partial. The local train line is no longer serving commuters—now operating solely for freight—and efforts are underway to restore passenger service. “How do we get people to public transit when it is so limited in where it goes?”

2. Are there any specific locations, incident types, or behaviors that either of you find especially concerning that are perhaps not captured?

- There needs to be emphasis on the long-term public health and safety implications when expanding major roadways. Route 7 is an example—originally designed 20 years ago without sufficient pedestrian infrastructure, leading to current safety issues such as pedestrians walking along high-speed highways in dark conditions without crosswalks, people trying to cross the 4-lane highway, leading to casualties. The biggest problem is speed, especially on long, straight corridors
- There was a recent corridor redesign along Federal Road that was successful in some respects but lacked a continuous center-turn lane, resulting in frequent rear-end and turning collisions. There is a need for improved lighting and visibility on high-traffic roads, such as reflective in-ground lighting and better pavement markings/illumination on new roadways to enhance safety and navigability, particularly where full street lighting isn’t feasible.
- There are echoing concerns around inadequate lighting and difficulty securing buy-in from ConnDOT around infrastructure improvements in towns (for instance Main Street in Bethel). Efforts to install safety measures such as RRFBs (Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons) often face administrative hurdles. Cross-agency cooperation is essential for effective implementation of pedestrian safety improvements.
 - One of the structural challenges is the location of housing along state highways, which were not originally designed for residential frontages. Unlike other regions, many Connecticut towns lack ring roads to divert traffic from local centers, making retroactive safety and access improvements difficult. Options like these are limited for existing corridors despite planning and zoning being able to support
- **Land Use and Transportation**
 - There were concerns raised about the misalignment between housing growth and transportation planning, with current development patterns not sufficiently considering trip generation, walkability, or transit access – specifically around the increase of units leading to car dependency and unsafe walking conditions in areas with no infrastructure to support multimodal travel.
 - Very few of these developments are located near or within a quarter mile of transit. Eliminating parking minimums often results in overflow parking on roadways and sidewalks, negatively impacting neighborhood livability and safety.

- Connecticut's 8-30g affordable housing policy has some well-integrated developments, linked to broader infrastructure systems such as transit, utilities, and energy
 - Tight-knit roadway networks struggle to accommodate the parking demands of higher-density housing.
 - How to address the ancillary impacts on housing development—such as access, parking, and infrastructure compatibility—with the community?
3. What do you believe is the most serious transportation issue in your community?
 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?
 5. What makes the WestCOG region unique when it comes to the discussion of traffic calming?
 6. What treatments or designs have you seen work elsewhere, that you'd love/hate to see in the region?
 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?)
 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?

- Street trees are a potential traffic calming strategy, particularly in areas with on-street parking. How can curb design, bump-outs, and tree plantings function not only as calming measures but also as environmental enhancements? There needs to be a holistic way of thinking about side-of-road amenities—how they can support both safety and ecological goals.
 - Conventional traffic calming frameworks often fail to fully incorporate trees beyond their aesthetic value. Trees are frequently treated primarily as collision hazards or obstacles in the clear zone, rather than being recognized as a form of green infrastructure. Properly placed trees can limit sight lines in a way that reduces vehicle speeds, a benefit that is often overlooked.
 - in District 3, policies prohibit tree branches from extending over state roads, which limits the use of trees to provide shade and weather protection, especially in areas lacking bus shelters. There is interest in evolving beyond traditional traffic engineering approaches to include a wider range of design tools and a need for bike-ped committees, in advancing this broader perspective.
 - Many WestCOG communities already demonstrate success with informal or natural traffic calming treatments—such as street trees, neighborhood boulders, and ad-hoc chicanes—which, when integrated into neighborhood design, contribute meaningfully to both safety and community character.