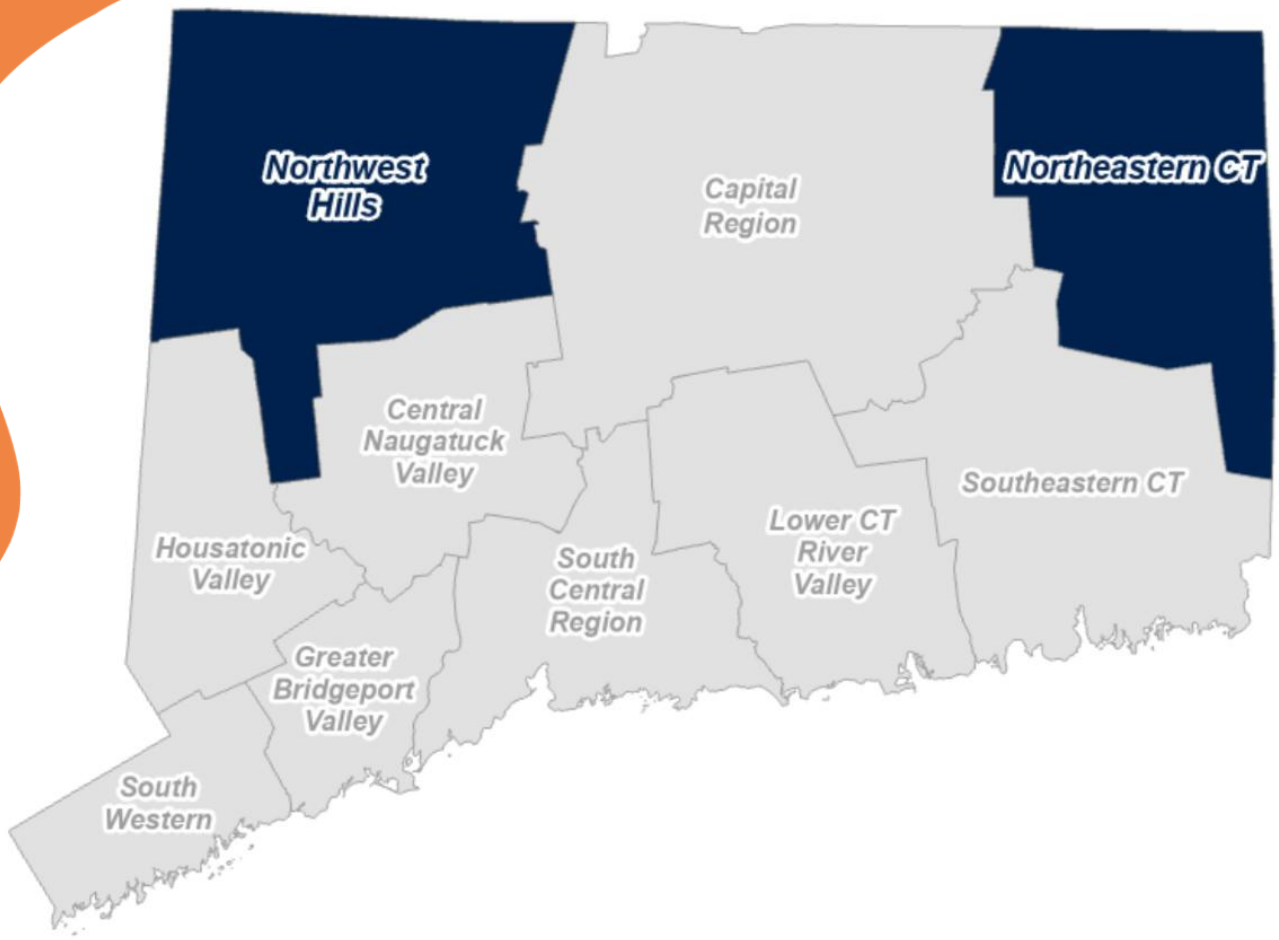
Consultation and Cooperation with Local Officials in Non-Metropolitan Areas

Connecticut Process Guide



Connecticut's Process for Consultation and Cooperation with Local Officials in Non-Metropolitan Areas

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Purpose and Background

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) has, for the past 30 years, involved the Rural Regional Planning Organizations, now referred to as the Rural Councils of Governments (rural COGs), in the preparation of the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and the Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). 23 CFR 450.210 requires each State develop a documented process for consulting with non-metropolitan local officials in the statewide transportation planning process. The following process is designed to fulfill this requirement by documenting the involvement of the rural COGs in the statewide transportation planning process.

Specifically, 23 CFR 450.210(b) states that "The State shall have a documented process(es) for cooperating with nonmetropolitan local officials representing units of general-purpose local government and/or local officials with responsibility for transportation that is separate and discrete from the public involvement process and provides an opportunity for their participation in the development of the long-range statewide transportation plan and the STIP." There are two rural COGs in the state of Connecticut: Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments and Northwest Hills Council of Governments. In accordance with Connecticut General Statutes, COG Boards are made up of local elected officials; therefore, local governments in the rural areas are continuously involved in the Transportation Planning Process through their participation in the rural COGs.

The CTDOT's MPO Coordination Unit serves as the liaison between the CTDOT and the rural COGs and consists of a staff of full-time liaisons. The liaisons are assigned to specific COGs to enable them to develop both ongoing and mutually beneficial relationships with the local elected officials, as well as a good working knowledge of the issues and concerns specific to each region. The liaisons attend COG Transportation and Board meetings and are in continuous communication with the rural COG staff.

The rural COG Boards help the CTDOT to coordinate transportation planning, research, project selection and project development, and also help to resolve inter-municipal transportation issues. Each fiscal year, the CTDOT provides state and federal planning funds to the rural COGs for highway and transit planning. The CTDOT also assists the rural COGs in developing their Unified Planning Work Programs (UPWPs) that identify the major transportation issues in their regions and outline the planning tasks necessary to address them. In addition, the rural COGs conduct other transportation planning activities, such as undertaking transit and highway corridor studies, and providing technical assistance to local municipalities.

Regional Transportation Plan

To ensure statewide planning coverage, the CTDOT recommends each rural COG to update its Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) every four years, which is consistent with the updated requirements for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in non-attainment areas for their Metropolitan Transportation Plans [23 CFR 450.324(c)]. As the rural COGs develop their RTPs, there is ongoing coordination and consultative review of, and comment on, the documents by the CTDOT prior to adoption by the rural COG. The State coordinates with MPOs and rural COGs to ensure that needs and priorities identified in their Regional and Metropolitan Transportation Plans (RTPs/MTPs) are incorporated, as appropriate, into the State's Long-Range Transportation Plan in compliance with Title 23 planning requirements.

Statewide Transportation Improvement Program

The CTDOT drafts the rural portions of the STIP for the rural COGs, consistent with 23 CFR 450.218(c). Member towns submit projects through their rural COGs for eventual inclusion in the STIP under federal programs, including but not limited to: Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG)-Other Urban, STBG-Rural, STBG- Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Congestion Mitigation and

Air Quality (CMAQ), and the Scenic Byways Program. The CTDOT reviews the proposed projects and, depending on complexity, need, and funding availability, includes them in the draft STIP. The CTDOT submits the draft STIP to the rural COGs for review and comment on the projects listed for their area. The rural COGs make this document available to the elected officials of their member towns, as well as to the public, for local review and discussion at publicly noticed rural COG meetings. There is also a review and comment period of 30 days for any Statewide Transportation Improvement Program amendments and a 14-day review period for actions submitted to a rural COG by the CTDOT. Any comments forwarded to the CTDOT by the rural COGs are addressed, and the rural portion of the STIP is incorporated into the final STIP.

The CTDOT's Office of Capital Services coordinates with the Rural Transit Districts' Executive Director/Manager and the CTDOT's Bureau of Public Transportation who oversees the transit services provided by the Rural Transit Districts to ensure their capital and operating needs are met. The FTA Section 5311 capital and operating projects are programmed in the CTDOT's 5-year Capital Plan as one line for the program. The individual capital and operating projects are determined annually with the development of the Program of Projects (POP) with the Transit Districts and the Bureau of Public Transportation. Necessary STIP actions are submitted to the STIP unit. Before inclusion in the STIP, the request is sent to the rural COGs for their review and comments, after which it is incorporated into the STIP.

Project Solicitation

Federal funding is made available to each rural COG through specific programs including, but not limited to, the CTDOT's STBG-Rural Major/Minor Collector Program (RMMCP), Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program and STBG-Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). Funding for the RMMCP is currently at $2 million per year, and the non-federal share for municipalities is 10 percent. A portion of CMAQ funding is set aside for the rural COGs and MPOs for projects selected on a competitive basis. STBG-TAP rural funds are also available to rural COGs for

projects selected on a competitive basis. It is each rural COG's responsibility to solicit its member towns and to develop projects for all these programs.