

CRCOG TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROGRAM ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT EFFORTS

Assessment period: July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2010

Time of review: September 2010

Date of report: December 22, 2010

❖ PART 1: INTRODUCTION

This is the seventh annual assessment of the Capitol Region Council of Governments' public involvement efforts. The first assessment was completed in December 2004, and has been completed annually since then.

During FY2010, two special studies were initiated: the I-84 Viaduct Study and the Route 6 Corridor Study. The Route 195 Corridor Study and the Safe Routes to Schools project continued from FY2009. The Route 305 Corridor Study and the Northwest Corridor Transit Study were completed during this assessment period. CRCOG staff also participated in a public outreach project undertaken at Manchester Community College.

CRCOG staff reviewed the public outreach efforts of these studies and again concluded that the public involvement program at CRCOG continues to be effective. Specific efforts and recommendations are highlighted below, followed by a detailed assessment of our efforts during the past fiscal year.

❖ PART 2: HIGHLIGHTED EFFORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following projects took place during FY2009: corridor studies for Route 305, Route 195, and Route 6; the Northwest Corridor Transit Study; the I-84 Viaduct Study; and a Safe Routes to School project. In addition, CRCOG worked with Manchester Community College as part of an FTA-funded grant received by MCC to investigate the ability of community college students to reach hard-to-reach populations in transit studies.

Efforts that were deemed deserving of specific recognition are listed below.

- A comprehensive and customized public outreach program was used for each of the several special studies undertaken this fiscal year.
- CRCOG's involvement with the Manchester Community College project may result in new public outreach methodologies.
- CRCOG is working to understand how "social media" such as Facebook and Twitter might be used in its public outreach program in the future.
- CRCOG continued to grow its website as a tool for public outreach, particularly for disseminating information about meetings and background materials for the Route 195, Route 305, and Northwest Transit special studies. CRCOG project managers also continued to rely more on communicating with interested persons through various emailed outreach.

The primary recommendation arrived at through this year's public outreach assessment is that CRCOG should continue its customized efforts to engage the public in its transportation planning program.

In addition:

- CRCOG should continue its existing public involvement program, and continue to look for new and interesting ways to involve a greater segment of our population. Specific outreach efforts should continue to be made to minority populations, low-income neighborhoods, person who do not speak English well, and persons with disabilities.
- Especially for corridor and other special studies, CRCOG should continue to work with local officials and community organizations to design a customized outreach program. If appropriate, CRCOG staff should ask those officials and organizations to place (at a minimum) a link on their website to our website for information about our projects and programs. Email “blasts” undertaken through those organizations, when appropriate, should also be considered.
- CRCOG should continue to make use of existing neighborhood groups and organizations to increase awareness of its projects and programs within the community.
- CRCOG should continue to use innovative ways to engage the public during information meetings including hands-on activities, break-out sessions, presentations on traffic simulations, and other visualization techniques.
- CRCOG should continue to act as an advocate for EJ, LEP and the disabled communities with State organizations, when appropriate, and through HEJN, the CCEJ and other local advocates for those communities.
- CRCOG should continue to engage local newspaper reporters and offer to assist with written articles or technical reviews of meeting proceedings.
- CRCOG should continue to make full use of the internet to reach out to interested parties, publishing up-to-date information about a project usually on its own dedicated webpage, and affording opportunities for feedback through comment emails and surveys. Social networking sites such as Facebook can be considered as an additional outreach tool. Results of the Sustainable Capitol Region Initiative in the area of “social media” will be valuable in determining the future use of those platforms for public outreach.
- CRCOG should continue to keep its website up-to-date, make available summary documents both in English and Spanish, and make every effort to assure that our website continues to be accessible to the disabled.
- CRCOG should continue to use a variety of media to publicize major events, and should continue to keep its media contact lists up-to date.

❖ **PART 3: STAFF ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT EFFORTS**

General Outreach

No general planning studies, such as the Regional Transportation Plan, were undertaken this year; the focus was instead on specific planning studies as described below. Most of our general outreach efforts were continued as in the past, however, including keeping the CRCOG website up-to-date and offering summary documents of our general plans both in English and Spanish. We continued to post Transportation Committee meeting materials on our website at least 10 days prior to each meeting, and meeting minutes as soon as possible following the meetings.

Website Accessibility: We continued our effort to assure that our website would be as accessible as possible, particularly to the blind and persons with limited vision. On a regular basis, we reviewed the most popular pages, including especially those that were modified the most (Home Page in particular, and special study pages), to assure that they continued to abide by the accessibility guidelines that had been developed in FY2008.

Media Contact List: Changes to the CRCOG Media list are made on a regular basis. A project to update the entire list will be made in FY2011.

Environmental Justice: A representative of the Hartford Environmental Justice Network continues to participate in CRCOG Transportation Committee as voting member.

Social Media: In June 2010, CRCOG received a grant for one year of technical assistance to develop a social media platform for our “Sustainable Capitol Region” initiative. This effort is aimed at reaching out to a broader audience and pulling in a different demographic than is typically involved in CRCOG’s work. Through updates, posts and tweets on the Facebook fan page, <https://www.facebook.com/SustainableCR>) and Twitter, @SustainableCR, a consistent message is conveyed about the Sustainable Capitol Region project. Staff at CRCOG who are directly involved in the initiative have also been advised to keep up to date with their LinkedIn accounts and utilize them to connect with those who may be interested in creating a more sustainable future for the Capitol Region. Transportation staff is participating in this project primarily as an observer and as a technical resource: the results of this effort will be used to guide the use of social media for transportation projects in the future.

Transportation Planning Program – Transit Planning

Northwest Corridor Study: Public involvement efforts for the Northwest Corridor Transit Study were mostly related to presenting the study results to the public, since the final recommendations for the project were made in May of 2009. We had the opportunity to present the study recommendations to three neighborhood groups and in a special workshop for the CT Coalition for Environmental Justice.

Manchester Community College Project: CRCOG worked with Manchester Community College as part of an FTA-funded grant received by MCC to investigate the ability of community college students to reach hard-to-reach populations in transit studies. We believe that this study may result in new ways to reach these special population groups.

Transportation Planning Program – Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning

In the past year, CRCOG continued its efforts to work with state and local government, various advocacy groups and the general public to move implementation of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan forward. We continued to expand our education program, with a grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, enabling us to directly reach 300 individuals and to provide them with a better understanding of how to operate bicycles safely. This program has now been turned over to Bike Walk CT for continued operation. Our bicycle and pedestrian planning program used innovative methods to reach out to the public, including enlisting volunteer assistance for a bicycle/pedestrian counting project and presenting a representative of a national bicycling group (League of American Bicyclists) in a public symposium to discuss bicycle friendly communities. In addition, staff worked directly with Bike Walk CT to stay

abreast of the concerns of cyclists. With our Safe Routes to Schools program, we found it helpful to work with the Parent Teacher Council in the City of Hartford to reach parents directly.

Transportation Planning Program – Traffic Studies

Route 195, Tolland: Work on the Route 195 Corridor Study continued in FY2010. As previously, staff and the consultant relied on input from municipal advisory committee members, municipal staff, Connecticut Department of Transportation officials, stakeholders and the community. The Route 195 Study webpage created specifically for this project proved a popular and effective communication device. Various options and alternative refinements were presented online and meeting information was also disseminated through that media. Use of email notifications was very successful in generating inquiries and meeting attendance. A large corridor map indicating proposed improvements was displayed in the Town Hall for the community to review.

Initially the study was intended to identify the transportation needs and define near and long-term improvements along a 2.5-mile stretch of Route 195, but early in the study it became apparent that the community had a strong interest in improvements to Tolland Green. Alternatives reviewed throughout this study focused on traffic calming and safety in this historic town center. The final plans create a more pedestrian friendly environment through the use of several traffic calming techniques, additional Green area, enhanced crosswalks, and overall increased safety. The study recommendations reflect comments from the Town and public, and have been accepted by the Advisory Committee and approved by the Town Council. Final documentation is scheduled to be completed in FY2011.

Route 305, Bloomfield/Windsor: The Route 305 Corridor Study was completed during FY2010. Endorsement was received from the Bloomfield Town Council and the Windsor Town Improvement Committee (Town Council Subcommittee). Final documentation was completed and posted on the CRCOG website alongside other study materials such as meeting minutes, newsletters, and presentations.

Route 6, Bolton/Coventry/Andover/Columbia: The Route 6 Corridor Study began in FY2010. Based on successful community outreach from previous studies, CRCOG staff and the consultant will rely on input from advisory committee members, municipal staff, ConnDOT officials, stakeholders and the community. The Route 6 Economic Development Council (REDC) was formed prior to the study and includes a mix of local officials, municipal staff, planning & zoning committee members, business owners, and residents from each of the four towns. The REDC's mission is to (1) cooperatively promote economic development along the Route 6 Corridor study area and (2) create a cohesive plan for development within the Route 6 Corridor. The REDC will serve as the study advisory committee.

CRCOG has developed a study website providing important information such as meeting dates and preliminary study findings. The website also includes meeting agendas, minutes, presentations, and background information. Email notifications are sent to registered interested parties prior to upcoming meetings. This study is in the early stages, but has already implemented several best practices adopted from previous studies.

I-84 Viaduct Study, Hartford: This study began early in FY2010. Due to the significance of this highway section and its impact on the surrounding neighborhoods, effective community outreach was of paramount importance. The HUB Advisory Committee, consisting of City staff,

residents, community organization members, major employers, stakeholders and ConnDOT officials, met at key milestones to provide input on proposed concepts and findings. The rigorous public outreach effort included a series of public informational meetings/workshops, newsletters, mailings, press releases, and stakeholder interviews/meetings to share information and receive comments and suggestions from the community.

Public meetings were heavily publicized through newspaper articles and notices (in English and Spanish), television news coverage, press releases, newsletters, email notifications, and postcard mailings. These meetings were well attended and provided valuable insights on alternative refinements. Workshops included breakout groups to encourage feedback and discussion. The project website provided study-related materials, background documents and base maps.