2018 Annual Report

From Our Director: Bill Fashing

2018 was an action-packed year for the CWCOG! With the support of our member agencies we made progress on several fronts, as well as approve a new logo to take us into the future. The dedication to work together for the betterment of our region’s future is one of the strongest bonds of our cooperative effort.

The new logo’s design represents that bond and the interconnectedness of our various organizations as we work together to enhance our region.

Staff completed two major transportation plans in 2018 with significant input from the public and the CWCOG membership. The 2045 Regional Transportation Plan has set the stage for the direction of our transportation infrastructure in the coming years. The 2018 Coordinated Public Transit - Human Services Transportation Plan Update focuses on our changing transit and public transportation needs within the region with an emphasis on special needs populations.

One of the most exciting accomplishments in 2018 was the finalization of the multi-year process to establish an Economic Development District to serve Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties. Approved by the Economic Development Administration in late 2018, the Economic Development District will operate under the CWCOG, opening the door for member agencies to seek federal funding for local economic development efforts.

From Our Chair: Troy Stariha

The combined square mileage of Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties is relatively small compared to other counties within the state; but, despite our small size, the region still faces some of the same issues as the larger counties. Our diverse economy can and does provide numerous opportunities and just as many challenges as our larger neighbors. And yet, the CWCOG and its dedicated members continue to address the ever-growing needs of our communities where economic development, transportation, and planning assistance are concerned.

I am pleased to say that our membership grew in 2018. We added Cowlitz Fire District 1 and the 911 Public Authority. The diversity of our membership lends itself to unique opportunities to make profound and positive impacts on our communities. Having representation from cities, counties, and special purpose districts ensures that concerns and needs are truly being addressed regionally.

The Executive Committee and Board of Directors made great strides towards many of the goals set for 2018. The CWCOG Articles of Association and Bylaws were amended and approved to reflect current practices and agreements. The two-county Economic Development District was established and bylaws created, and a new agency logo and public records request policy were adopted.

Thank you for your on-going support and participation in the CWCOG. Regional, long-term planning is important to the future of our communities, and the CWCOG is the entity to move us forward. I look forward to continuing to serve as a CWCOG board member. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Chair these last two years.

Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments
Medical Rate Stabilization Committee

CWCOG continued to work with members to improve employee health and wellness and address the on-going challenges of health care costs. This year we had an average adjustment of 9%, higher than previous years but still well below the 10-year national average. Those participating recognize that by encouraging wellness initiatives and healthy behaviors, health benefit rates will continue to stabilize and contribute towards more stable medical rates for our member agencies.

Skills Center Feasibility Study

CWCOG staff served on the Steering Committee for the Cowlitz, Lewis, and Wahkiakum Counties Skills Center Branch Campus Feasibility Study. The CWCOG assisted in providing key demographics for the study. At its May meeting, the CWCOG Board of Directors approved a letter of commitment for the Skills Center that was included in the final Feasibility Study.

Army Corps of Engineers

The CWCOG Board of Directors supported a letter to the Army Corps of Engineers requesting a change in regulatory jurisdiction. The CWCOG Board of Directors approved a letter of commitment for the Skills Center that was included in the final Feasibility Study.

Rural Pathways to Prosperity

The CWCOG facilitated the WSU Pathways to Prosperity event in 2018, CWCOG staff:

• Provided a map of proposed bicycle facilities in Longview based on input from the Longview Active Transportation group
• Prepared updated land use maps for the Longview Comprehensive Plan and the City of Castle Rock
• Prepared map commissioner districts and boundary maps for the Ports of Woodland and Longview
• Prepared port-owned property maps for the Port of Woodland
• Completed a steep slope analysis and mapping project for the City of Longview
• Updated crash data for the MPO/RTP areas
• Provided crash data to the Port of Kalama
• Updated business location data and fixed transit routes for the MPO/RTP areas
• Prepared demographic maps for the Highlands neighborhood in Longview
• Prepared locator maps for the CEDS document
• Researched and confirmed the legal description of the Woodland School District boundaries
• Prepared a map of building sites in Wahkiakum County for the broadband project
• Prepared demographic and population density maps for the regional transit agencies
• Completed location analysis based on travel times to identify most central locations for the skills center branch

Regional Real Estate Forum

The Regional Real Estate Forum was held on May 22. Presenters included: Scott Bailey, Employment Security Department; Steve Madsen, Aho Construction; Erica Rodman, Woodland Real Estate; and Ray Pyle, Catlin Properties, Inc. Discussion topics included real estate issues and trends, market conditions, and opportunities for new development.

Six Rivers Bike Trail

CWCOG staff served on the Coordination Team which was responsible for research and preparation for the Steering Committee and local workgroups. CWCOG staff played a lead role with map preparation and coordination with the Cowlitz County Regional Trails Plan. An interactive Six Rivers Bike Trail map was created for the public to view and is available on the CWCOG website or on mobile devices using Explorer for ArcGIS.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

GIS staff gather, manage, and analyze spatial data organizing it into maps to help people make more informed decisions. In 2018, CWCOG staff:

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Coordinated Public Transit—Human Services Transportation Plan Update (CPT-HSTP)

The CPT-HSTP for the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTP) focuses on the issues of mobility for those with disabilities, low-income, younger and elderly individuals, veterans, and rural residents are concerned. The plan is updated every 4 years to address the ever-changing needs of the region. The plan covers existing mobility services, additional needs for services, and future strategies for meeting those needs.

Intelligent Transportation System (ITS)

ITS technologies advance transportation safety and mobility and improve the movement of goods and services by integrating communication technologies into the infrastructure, and connecting passenger and commercial vehicles.

A development team consisting of staff from the CWCOG, City of Longview, Federal Highway Administration, and their consultants worked on shaping the ITS architecture for the Longview-Kelso-Rainier Metropolitan Planning Area. They held a kick-off workshop in October bringing together key stakeholders, providing an introduction to the planned ITS architecture, and giving stakeholders an opportunity to provide input on existing and future ITS services.

The ITS architecture work is expected to be completed by the summer of 2019.

Highway Infrastructure Program (HIP) Awards

The CWCOG Board of Directors awarded $232,310 of federal funds under the HIP to the City of Longview for Washington Way & 1st Avenue Corridor Traffic Signal Project ($180,833) and to Cowlitz County for Delameter Road Reconstruction ($51,477) in December 2018.

Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program Awards

The Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTP) Board awarded a total of $393,599 of federal funds under TA in February and September 2018 to address five projects totaling $593,599 of federal funds under the HIP to the City of Longview for Washington Way & 1st Avenue Corridor Traffic Signal Project ($180,833) and to Cowlitz County for Delameter Road Reconstruction ($51,477) in December 2018.

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2045 Regional Transportation Plan

The 2045 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) was completed in 2018. It is actually two plans in one: a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) for the Longview-Kelso-Rainier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for the five-county SWRTP. The 2045 RTP provides a 27-year look into the future and will be used to guide decisions and prioritize investments to meet current and anticipated demands on the regional transportation system.

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Economic Development District Designation

Formal approval from the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the new Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Economic Development District was received in late 2018. The letter stated, “EDA is committed to providing financial assistance to meet the economic development needs of distressed communities throughout the United States. Our mission is to lead the federal economic development agenda by promoting innovation and competitiveness preparing American regions for growth and success in the worldwide economy. To that end this designation will serve as a foundation for future economic successes that will benefit both families and businesses in your region.”

As part of the designation, EDA named the CWCOG as the District Organization and the CWCOG Board of Directors as the administrative board for the Economic Development District.

Business Revolving Loan Fund

Jeffery Peterson, Business Program Specialist from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, attended the October 31 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee meeting and educated the Committee on various aspects of the revolving loan fund programs. Committee members explored the Rural Business Development Grant Program, the Intermediary Relend Program, and the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program. A Revolving Loan Fund Task Force was established to bring forward possible recommendations to expand the CWCOG program in 2019.

Resilience Training

A Resilience Training was held at a joint Economic Development Program Board and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee meeting on December 10. Phil Jurmu from the Cowlitz 911 Public Authority and Lorraine Churchill from the Cowlitz County Department of Emergency Management spoke to the seventeen attendees regarding business resilience and further outlined disaster preparedness for homes and businesses.

The attendees proposed a business continuity outreach calendar for 2019 and established a Resilience Task Force. The Resilience Task Force meetings will be scheduled in 2019 to discuss how to promote business resilience within the region.

Census

The CWCOG continued to serve as the Census affiliate for the region. Work includes providing input to the Census Bureau and assisting members in gaining access to Census products. 2019 will see an increase in efforts in preparation for the 2020 Census through the Complete Count Committee.

Longview Revolving Loan Fund Update

The Longview Revolving Loan Fund Plan was updated per Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration requirements. The document was approved by the Board of Directors at its September meeting.