

Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments

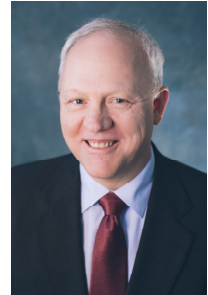
2015 ANNUAL REPORT

From the Director

In recognition of another milestone for the CWCOCG and the end of my first full year as Executive Director, I'd like to thank each of you for what you have contributed to both our community and our organization in 2015. Each city, county, school district, and special district has, in their own unique role, added to the progress of our greater community and worked hard to serve our local residents. Thank you for what you do day to day to promote and grow the communities in which we live.

Two thousand fifteen was a year of growth and change for the CWCOCG. Staff continued to serve with a strong commitment to our members and a flexible attitude as priorities shifted throughout the year. Initiatives were moved forward, relationships were strengthened, and solutions were found as we worked together on shared challenges and issues.

Over the CWCOCG's 50+ year history, the organization has impacted a significant number of projects and programs throughout the region. We look forward to 2016 as we continue to do so by providing an environment that encourages positive discussions and collaborative, supporting solutions that lead to improved outcomes, and finding new ways to help our members and stakeholders through the region plot a path toward a more prosperous future.



The organizational successes we experience are due to the participation, guidance and support of you, our members, and for that, I thank you.



Transportation

Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) Expanded - With the results of the 2010 Census showing growth in the Longview-Kelso-Rainier urbanized area over the prior ten years, meetings were held with Cowlitz County, Longview, Kelso, Rainier and the Washington and Oregon transportation departments to discuss the need for boundary changes to the MPA. From those conversations, staff developed two boundary proposals to present to the Cowlitz Area Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

After discussing the merits of each proposal, the TAC recommended to modify the MPA to include the adjusted urbanized area and the Federal Aid Urban Boundary. The revised MPA boundary will more accurately reflect the extent of current transportation planning activities.

In February 2015, the CWCOCG Board approved the revision of the MPA as recommended by the TAC, and subsequently, was then approved by Oregon's and Washington's Governors in June and July, 2015.

System Improvement - New processes for adding projects to the State Transportation Improvement

Program (STIP) were created greatly reducing the time needed to review the almost 500 proposals submitted in 2015 by regional entities. The new system includes an educational component that (1) ensures that the entities only present projects that are eligible for listing in the STIP, and (2) improves the communication process facilitating the efficient approval and listing of the appropriate projects.

General Transit Feed Specification Project - CWCOCG staff directly impacted the region's public transportation system by spearheading a project that incorporated the fixed routes of five transit agencies into on-line service, *Google Transit*, greatly improving the convenience for all local transit users.

Users of Pacific Transit, Twin Transit, LEWIS Mountain Highway Transit, Lower Columbia CAP Transit, and Wahkiakum on the Move can now plan their trips online through Google's easy to use trip planning service. The service will also help users navigate transfers between transit providers.

This project will continue to grow and enhance the overall Intelligent Transportation System of the region well into 2016.

Transportation, continued

Fire and Ice Scenic Loop - The Fire and Ice Scenic Loop Corridor Management Plan was adopted by the CWCOG Board in July 2015. This plan involved numerous hours of meetings with the steering committee and technical teams that worked tirelessly to complete the project. To the right is a map showing the entire loop around Mount St. Helens. The plan was sent to the Washington State Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration for approval. To understand and review the full, visit the CWCOG's website at: www.cwco.org./fireice.

Metropolitan and Regional Transportation Plan (M/RTP) Update - The primary purpose of the M/RTP is to provide an overarching vision and 25-year direction for the transportation system serving the Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization areas.

The M/RTP is centered on a shared regional vision - a statement of aspiration for the future of the transportation system. Five goals and 28 policies were crafted in order to assist the region's advancement toward this vision. The M/RTP proposes a list of next steps to provide further guidance for plan implementation, helping bring the vision to fruition.

The plan was developed through a cooperative process of regional stakeholders, consisting of two state

Fire & Ice Scenic Loop



departments of transportation, 28 cities, five counties, five tribal governments, 12 ports, four transit authorities, and numerous other stakeholders.

This M/RTP was adopted by the Board in October 2015.

Economic Development

Southwest Washington Economic Development District (SWEDD) - The main objective for 2015 was to complete the SWEDD Interlocal Agreement between Cowlitz and Lewis Counties amending it to incorporate Wahkiakum County and its boundaries thus finalizing the State-approved boundary change. Considerable time and effort was dedicated by staff, the SWEDD and CWCOG Board Chairmen towards this effort. With the close of 2015, a draft was completed and moved forward to the separate counties for legal review, approval, and signatures with finalization to be seen in 2016.

Housing for Economic Development - Lead-in meetings were coordinated by staff for the "40 for 2020 Housing for Economic Development" work groups to explore housing strategies in preparation for a community event scheduled for January 2016.

Staff researched and compiled a collection of resources in an effort to clarify the possible approaches to housing crunch concerns. In addition, staff prepared and delivered a presentation to several groups regarding competitiveness of local housing stock.

Longview Revolving Loan Fund - The Longview Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) Program, funded by the federal Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) and matched with

funds from the City of Longview, is a long-standing partnership program between the CWCOG and the City of Longview. The program provides small loan opportunities for start-up, capital, and growth projects to businesses within the Longview area. One new loan was approved and issued in 2015 for Estitica.

Medical Rate Stabilization Committee - The Medical Rate Stabilization Committee was established to assist members by creating a health insurance pool that would, over time, improve risk measurements and thus improve the stability and predictability of annual benefit rates. In order to do so, members agree to participate in a Health Risk Management program designed to manage risk and promote wellness within their individual organizations. Participants recognize that by encouraging wellness initiatives and driving healthy behaviors, the stability of the pool will be strengthened over the long run.

The Committee reported a 2015 rate increase that was 50% less than the national average showing that within five years of establishment, participants were seeing considerable savings while still providing solid benefit coverage to their employees. Benefits of pooling include: lower administration costs, stabilization of rate swings, more credibility towards experience in a larger group, and more detailed utilization reports.

The pool continues to be used nationwide by Kaiser Permanente as a successful example of risk pooling.

Community Development

Fostering Economic Development Using Smart Growth Strategies - CWCOG, in partnership with the City of Kelso, Washington, received technical assistance from Environmental Protection Agency's Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program to develop a smart growth economic development strategy focusing on the South Kelso neighborhood, specifically downtown Kelso, the South Kelso residential community, and the Talley Way industrial area. The Using Smart Growth Strategies to Foster Economic Development: A Kelso, Washington, Case Study (2015) aims to help cities like Kelso rethink how to address economic development challenges with small, manageable solutions that create stronger, more resilient communities.

Kaiser Active Living Grant - During 2015, staff made significant progress in substantive areas such as integrating a health policy into the M/RTP. All team members remain committed to finalizing the implementation strategy for the public engagement plan developed by Pathways 2020. Meetings have focused on identifying all data available to make a compelling case for integrating active living and health within planning processes throughout the region. An extensive effort was made to collect health data at the neighborhood level, which involved considerable time and efforts collaborating with community health providers. Next steps are to finalize the "compelling data" for fact sheets to be used in early 2016 as the implementation of the public engagement plan is rolled out.

All agencies within the partnership continue to participate in the regional Healthy Living Collaborative on a number of issues, particularly involving Complete Streets implementation and active living strategies.

Cowlitz Housing First! Coalition Activities - The goal of the Cowlitz Housing First! Coalition is to provide an integrated system of services that assists those facing homelessness as quickly as possible. To this end, the Coalition, facilitated by CWCOG staff, sponsored several activities throughout 2015.

Project Homeless Connect (PHC) - Another successful PHC event was held in January 2015 with 266 homeless individuals receiving services and a hot meal at the Longview Armory. Project Homeless Connect enables service agencies to efficiently reach many people in a single day. At the same time, the community is educated about the issues surrounding homelessness, and community members are able to volunteer their skills, talents, and compassion.

Trainings - CWCOG staff facilitated several trainings/workshops throughout the year. Cowlitz County agencies were joined by social service agencies from Clark and Lewis counties for the purposes of improving

the knowledge and skills of people working in human services, particularly in homeless services, within the region.

Ten-Year Plan Update - Washington State Department of Commerce requires local homeless housing plans to be updated every five years. This effort began in 2015 with collection of data and discussion with members. A final plan document will be developed and presented to the Board of Commissioners in 2016.

Boundary Review Board (BRB) - After many years of service to the communities in Cowlitz County, CWCOG ended its participation in the Cowlitz County BRB in 2015. The activities of the BRB were moved to Cowlitz County's Department of Building and Planning.

Kalama Comprehensive Plan Visioning Process - As part of the City's comprehensive plan update, CWCOG staff embarked on an extensive visioning process with the planning commission, city council, and the public. The goal was to help establish a clear community vision to guide the city as it develops goals and policies. This process included a visual preference survey where over 300 participants gave their opinions on how the community should appear as it develops over the next 20 years. A public workshop was held in September where residents and other stakeholders had the opportunity to engage in a group discussion with City officials regarding the community's future.

Ilwaco Planning Services - In October, the City of Ilwaco signed its first contract with CWCOG for planning services. CWCOG staff now serves as the official City Planner for Ilwaco, providing support for all development applications, code changes, as well as long-range and comprehensive planning. Since October, CWCOG staff have assisted Ilwaco with updating its comprehensive plan and handled numerous requests regarding permitting and environmental review processes.

City of Castle Rock & Castle Rock School District Park & Recreation Plan Update - Staff began updating the Park and Recreation Plan for the City of Castle Rock and Castle Rock School District. An extensive survey was conducted with over 600 responses that helped identify plan components and community support. The plan is scheduled for completion in early 2016.

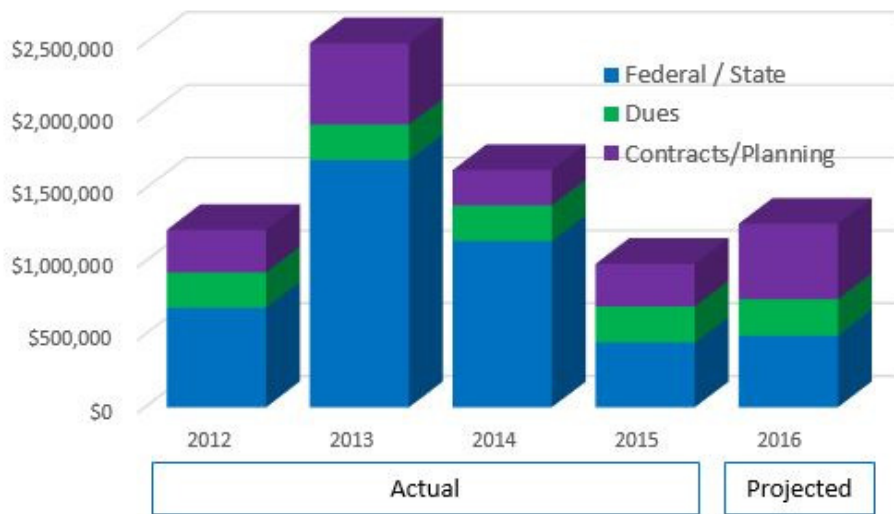


Member Activities

During 2015, CWCOCG assisted our members in a number of ways. A sampling of data requests filled by staff included:

- ◆ Castle Rock Youth Demographic Assessment
- ◆ Cowlitz County Title VI Demographic Update
- ◆ LMI map development for Kelso/Longview
- ◆ Kalama School District demographics
- ◆ Cathlamet lighting project support
- ◆ Data for disaster relief efforts
- ◆ Mapping for Port of Longview
- ◆ Longview Ditch Drainage System map

Finances



Beginning Fund Balance	\$289,880
<u>Revenues</u>	
Federal / State	\$444,958
Dues	\$248,048
Contracts/Planning	\$293,043
Total Revenues	\$986,049
Total Resources	\$1,275,929
<u>Expenditures</u>	
Personnel Cost	\$704,482
Contracts	\$74,321
Other Services	\$164,913
Capital Outlay	\$20,711
Total Expenditures	\$964,427
Reserve Funds	\$150,000
Ending Fund Balance*	\$161,502

* Includes \$70,000 in Kaiser Grant Funds not yet expended

Our Staff

Management

Bill Fashing, Executive Director
 Melissa Taylor, Planning Manager
 Anisa Kisamore, Office Administrator

Support

Rachelle Nugent, Administrative Assistant / HR
 Randy Poole, Finance Assistant (*4/15)
 Katie Wells, Administrative Assistant (*8/15)

Planning

Deborah Johnson, Economic Development
 Lisa Brosnan, Economic Development (*5/15)
 Judith Donovan, Transportation
 Matt Buchanan, Community Development (*12/15)
 Sam Rubin, Community Development
 Don Mathison, Community Development (P/T)

* resigned/retired

Our Membership

General Members

Cowlitz County
 Wahkiakum County
 City of Castle Rock
 City of Kalama
 City of Kelso
 City of Longview
 City of Woodland
 Town of Cathlamet

Special Members

Beacon Hill Water & Sewer District
 Cowlitz PUD

Special Members (cont)

Cowlitz 2 Fire & Rescue
 Cowlitz Fire District 5
 Castle Rock School District
 Kalama School District
 Kelso School District
 Longview School District
 Woodland School District
 Port of Kalama
 Port of Longview
 Port of Woodland
 Wahkiakum Port District 1

Associate Members

City of Rainier, OR
 Cowlitz EDC
 Longview Housing Authority
 Lower Columbia CAP
 Lower Columbia College
 Kelso Longview Chamber
 Wahkiakum Chamber

Affiliate Members

City of Battle Ground
 City of Camas
 City of Washougal