

2020 Annual Report



Cowlitz-Wahkiakum
Council of Governments

Working Together to Enhance Our Region.

From Our Director: Bill Fashing



For a region that has seen a wide variety of economic challenges in decades past, the last year will likely stand out for some time and will be one for the history books. It will be known here and elsewhere as a time where we were able to come together at a regional level and charge forward. It will be remembered as the year that video conferencing truly come of age. And it was the year that America realized the true importance of broadband in our daily lives.

The obstacles of COVID 19 provided a number of opportunities and progress on many fronts for the CWCOG and its membership. An influx of CARES Act funding through the Economic Development Administration is providing an opportunity to take on the economic recovery with staff resources at hand. The CWCOG hired TIP Strategies to assist with the development of a Resilience and Recovery plan that will become an element of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Broadband work will likely place highly in the strategies coming forward.

I greatly appreciate the strength of the board of directors' engagement during this challenging year. Despite the huge influx of new challenges and responsibilities dropped upon each of our member agencies they maintained their engagement. In many cases the level of regional engagement increased and parties worked together to meet the need of the Pandemic and adjust to new realities.

Thanks to each of you for your dedication to the community and region we serve.

Best wishes for 2021.

From our Chair: Dennis Weber



As we head into our 60th year of service, I am proud to report success in rebuilding service capacity for our core functions: evaluating state and federal transportation improvements; facilitating economic resilience and growth opportunities; assisting members with updating comprehensive plans; and pooling medical insurance coverage. Plus, we are continuing work on Cowlitz River sediment management, rails-to-trails planning, and an expanded revolving loan fund program.

Critical to our continued success are the excellent relationships we maintain with our congressional delegation, the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) and the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT). In addition, we collaborate with the Washington State Department of Commerce and the Oregon Department of Transportation.

But most importantly, we can be proud of our relationships with each other. The members of this organization are stronger and more effective when we work together, not only through the Board of Directors and committees, but also the informal contacts we make with each other – sharing ideas, concerns, and strategies. It has certainly made a difference in 2020 as we journeyed through the ravages of the pandemic: the incredible emergency response team earlier in the year here in Cowlitz County, the Wahkiakum County economic response discussion group, the school superintendents' collaborative on CARES Act funding and the list goes on.

Many thanks to our gifted staff and talented board members.

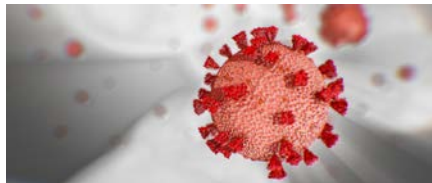
I am optimistic about our future and hope you are, too!



COVID-19 Relief Projects

During 2020, the CWCOG played an integral role in moving COVID-19 related projects forward. Among these projects was a business retention and expansion project during with the CWCOG was contracted by the City of Kelso to curate resources aimed at helping businesses navigate available funding, access COVID related PPE and mitigation strategies, and provide resources to assist them in the long term. Outreach was conducted through four virtual business forums

The City of Longview also reached out to the CWCOG to assist in a COVID-19 related project. The Micro Enterprise Forgivable Loan program was targeted at businesses with five or fewer employees within the Longview city limits. Over 70 businesses applied and over \$190,000 in forgivable loans was awarded.



2020 Census Complete Count Committee

The work of the Complete Count Committee continued in 2020! Outreach was conducted to promote census participation and to educate the community on the importance of the census.



Specifically by working with area libraries who assisted area residents in completing their census questionnaire by making computers available on Census Day for the public to use. We are pleased to report that both Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties surpassed their self-response rate from the 2010 Census. The CWCOG will continue to keep the Census page on its website up to date with the latest information on the progress of the data release.

Broadband Access

In 2020, the CWCOG made effort to expand broadband access throughout the region. Staff develop an economic impact analysis of broadband for Wahkiakum County to support the Wahkiakum PUD in an EDA grant application to expand broadband infrastructure. Staff initiated the process to establish a region-wide Broadband Action Team through conversations with the Washington Statewide Broadband Office as well as promoted the State's broadband access survey to help map broadband throughout the region.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

CWCOG GIS staff completed multiple GIS projects for our members. Some of these included creating models and maps for the SR 4 Corridor Planning Study in the Longview/Kelso area, maintaining the SR 4 corridor web map, updates to the online ArcGIS map of the Six Rivers Trail system to view on mobile devices, and a review of the 2020 Census Participant Statistical Area Program boundaries in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties. Other notable projects included

creating an automated flyover of the Mount St. Helens sediment flow affecting the Toutle, Cowlitz, and Columbia rivers and creating infographics presenting demographic data for regional partners.



Informational Interviews

In September of 2020, the CWCOG staff engaged several of its members in virtual informational interviews about economic-development related successes, shortcomings, projects, and plans. The purpose was to understand the state of the community and to identify how the CWCOG's role can be most effective in serving the area and to introduce new staff members to the community. The information gathered will help shape future CWCOG programming and planning projects.

Housing Needs Assessment (HNA)

The process began in December with holding Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings to gather input from the community and focused on next steps to HNA completion, demographic data, and strategies to increase housing production and affordability. A survey was marketed in December and will close at the end of January 2021. The overall document is meant to serve as a guidance for local governments in developing affordable housing policies and attracting opportunities for more development.



Lower Columbia Investment Network

CWCOG worked with Washington State University Extension and local champions from the region to establish the Lower Columbia Investment Network. The network aims to build wealth in the local community by bringing together businesses in need of funding with investors interested in seeing their money invested in their community. CWCOG hosted 6 community meetings to organize and promote the network and began planning launch events for early 2021.



Revolving Loan Fund

An additional \$540,000 in CARES Act money was received to recapitalize the Longview Revolving Loan Fund Program. This program is intended for businesses that cannot otherwise obtain traditional bank financing. These loans provide access to capital as gap financing to enable small businesses to grow and generate new employment opportunities with competitive wages and benefits. Since the program inception, over \$2.2 million has been loaned creating and retaining over 630 jobs in the community.



Regional Economic Vitality Survey

As a follow up to the 2019 survey of the same name, this survey aimed to

provide information to the CWCOG to serve its member agencies and improve economic vitality and quality of place within the region. While the survey was open from July 2020 -September 2020, over 150 responses were received from throughout the region. Look for the final report in early 2021!

Recovery and Resilience Update to the CEDS Document

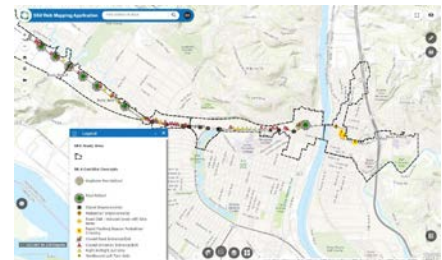
With funding from the 2020 CARES Act, CWCOG staff and CEDS Committee members hired TIP Strategies, an economic development planning consulting firm, to develop a Recovery and Resiliency Update to the 2018-2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Staff will be working closely with TIP through August 2021 to conduct outreach and develop strategies to promote economic COVID recovery and ongoing resilience throughout the region.

Public Transportation

In conjunction with Twin Transit, to a Public Transportation Interagency Summit, that was well attended, was held. The purpose of the summit was to encourage coordination of regional public transportation issues. Staff also compiled a regional mobility guide that provides information on the services available in the five-county region. The release has been delayed due to the COVID-19 reductions in service but is expected to be released in 2021. Staff coordinated a review and ranking of regional projects applying for WSDOT's Coordinated Grant Program funding. Over \$5.9 million was requested by the agencies. This included a request from the CWCOG to create a Regional Mobility Manager positions that would assist in planning and coordination efforts for the 5-county RTPPO region.

SR 4 Corridor Planning Study

CWCOG staff collaborated with Kelso, Longview, Cowlitz County, and WSDOT in preparing the State Route 4 Corridor Planning Study. The study is intended to define, support and prioritize strategic and actionable outcomes for the long-term economic development of the corridor. It aims to improve the overall connectivity and mobility in the study area, improve safety by reducing potential conflicts between transportation modes, and enhance economic vitality. The study area extends from Crescent Drive on the east to Coal Creek Road on the west, passing through the City of Kelso, the City of Longview and unincorporated Cowlitz County.



Electric, Connected, and Autonomous Vehicles Planning

The *Transportation Innovations: Preparing for Electric Vehicles and Connected and Autonomous Vehicles* plan was completed in June 2020. One of the primary reasons for the plan was to develop tools and resources to aid future coordination, collaboration, or future grant applications. It will be a resource guide for member agencies, stakeholders, and others. It will also assist in beginning a discussion of potential impacts from emerging technologies on our transportation system.

CWCOG Members

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

Port of Kalama
 Port of Longview
 Port of Woodland
 Wahkiakum Port 1
 Castle Rock School District
 Kalama School District
 Kelso School District
 Longview School District
 Woodland School District
 Cowlitz 2 Fire and Rescue
 Cowlitz Fire District #5
 Cowlitz Fire District #1
 Beacon Hill Water & Sewer District
 Cowlitz Public Utility District
 Wahkiakum Public Utility District

Associate Members

Lower Columbia College
 Lower Columbia Community
 Action Program
 Cowlitz Economic Development
 Council
 Cowlitz Transit Authority
 Housing Opportunities of
 SW WA
 Kelso-Longview Chamber
 Wahkiakum County Chamber
 City of Rainier, OR
 911 Public Authority

Affiliate Members

City of Camas
 City of Battle Ground
 City of Washougal
 Three Rivers Regional
 Wastewater Authority

CWCOG Staff

Management

Bill Fashing, Executive Director
 Anisa Kisamore, Chief Administration Officer

Support

Lauren Read, Planning Assistant
 Rachelle Thomas, Business Administrator

Planning

Ken Pearrow, Transportation
 Robert Stevens, Transportation
 Keshia Owens, Community Development
 Elena Cangelosi, Community Development
 Brandon Robinson, Community Development
 Matt Roth, Community Development (02/20)*
 Skip Urling, Community Development P/T (09/20)*
 Peggy Skeahan, Community Development/Wellness P/T (12/20)*

**Resigned/Retired*

CWCOG Finances

	2020
Beginning Fund Balance	\$411,926
<u>Revenues</u>	
Federal / State	\$618,950
Dues	\$274,931
Contracts/Planning	\$173,122
Total Revenues	\$1,067,003
<u>Expenditures</u>	
Personnel Cost	\$622,355
Contracts	\$151,750
Other Services	\$70,499
Capital Outlay/Leases	\$10,724
Total Expenditures	\$855,328
Total Resources	\$623,600
Reserve Funds	\$450,000
Ending Fund Balance*	\$173,600

