

Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments

2023 Annual Report



“Working Together to Enhance Our Region”



MESASGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I have been honored to serve as Chair of the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments for a second term. I extend sincere thanks and appreciation to the Board and excellent staff for the confidence reposed in me in carrying out the important work of the Council.

Several highlights of the past year present themselves as worthy of note. Completion of the 2023-2028 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy deserves mention, along with completion of Broadband Action and Digital Equity plans for each County, and initiation of work on a 5-county regional trails program. Also notable is the signing by CWCOG of a three-year Washington Traffic Safety Committee contract to manage the Target Zero Program for Cowlitz, Lewis, and Wahkiakum Counties.



Public transportation projects logged many accomplishments including adoption of a new Metropolitan and Regional Transportation Plan “Moving Forward 2050” for the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Southwest Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO) and the Boards’ completion of the 2023-2025 Consolidated Grant regional ranking process. Consistent progress in the Metropolitan/Regional Transportation Improvement Program included the processing of numerous amendments to the 2023-2026 Program.

Public transit user enhancements were also developed including a new Trip Assistant website featuring a trip planner and provider directory along with a series of *How to Ride* videos in cooperation with RiverCities Transit. I also want to call out the noteworthy recognition of the CWCOG via the Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations.

At a staff level, CWCOG benefits from the continuing veteran leadership of Bill Fashing and support from each of the agency’s very skilled and able staff.

Since 1961, CWCOG has proudly carried out its important regional work while the leadership and staff of the agency continue to support our members. Thanks to everyone for their generous support of the important work of our region through the CWCOG. I look forward to working together toward more accomplishments in 2024.

David Olson—Mayor, Town of Cathlamet

The CWCOG received a grant through the Washington State Microenterprise Association to support microenterprise efforts within the region and provide training in conjunction with Lower Columbia College (LCC) and other partners to provided resources to area residents in an effort to start and grow local businesses.

The CWCOG held two grant classes and one grant roundtable. In total, the effort served 50 area businesses and agency staff members.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2023 was a strong year for the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG) as it relates to regional progress and the financial health of the organization. Each month was marked by the noteworthy successes of our small but skilled and accomplished team.

The 2023-2028 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and the Moving Forward 2050-Metropolitan/Regional Transportation Plan (M/RTP) were approved. These two documents are developed every five years and provide the organization's vision for the coming years.

Major planning documents relating to digital equity and broadband needs for both Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties were completed in less than three months. These documents supported the state broadband planning process that led to an award of over \$1.2 billion in federal funding to support broadband networks across the state.

At the request of the Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC), the CWCOG undertook the management of the Region 3 Target Zero Program. Region 3 includes the counties of Cowlitz, Lewis, and Wahkiakum. The program provides the CWCOG and the Southwest Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO) engagement with local traffic safety educational and enforcement efforts. This new program aligns with the long-standing safety planning work of the CWCOG under both the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the SWRTPO.

Work supporting the Spirit Lake/Toutle – Cowlitz River Collaborative (SLTCRC) continued to be a major regional priority and thus the CWCOG. For our efforts The National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) presented the Collaborative a 2023 NADO Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award. The award honors significant advances in community and economic development.

Staff also initiated work on comprehensive safety action plans for Cowlitz County and six incorporated cities. The work supports grant applications focused on improvements that align with the CWCOG Safety Performance Measures; an outline of targeted efforts to reduce the number of fatal and serious injury collisions within the region.

Finally, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) funded the two-year-old mobility management program for another four years. This five-county program has made noteworthy progress in its first two years of operation to serve the transit dependent populations and coordinating the service providers throughout the region.

Moving into 2024, staff will continue their work to support the needs of our membership on issues of relevance throughout the region. Thank you for your ongoing support as we enter another year of *Working Together to Enhance our Region*.

William A. Fashing—Executive Director, CWCOG



During 2023 CWCOG staff completed the Spanish translation of the Small Business Resiliency Toolkit and distributed it through a variety of channels. Staff also updated and translated the instruction page on how to use the Toolkit based on input from users.

TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS

Surface Transportation Block Grant Set Aside (Transportation Alternatives) Funding Awards

The SWRTPO Board awarded \$1,557,571 in federal funding under the Surface Transportation Block Grant Set Aside (Transportation Alternatives) grant program in December 2023. Transportation Alternatives (TA) provides funds to support bicycle and pedestrian-related projects. TA awards went to 5 projects.

- ◇ Lewis County Transit: \$194,625 to Safety & ADA Compliance for Community, Students, and Transit project to construct sidewalk improvements on South Market Boulevard/Jackson Highway in Chehalis.
- ◇ CWCOC: \$80,000 to Rails to Trails Planning project supporting efforts to convert former Columbia & Cowlitz Railway line into an off-road trail.
- ◇ Pacific County: \$446,000 to SR 101 Seaview to Ilwaco Connector Pathway project.
- ◇ City of Aberdeen: \$400,000 to Sumner Avenue (US 101) Sidewalk Improvements project.
- ◇ City of Woodland: \$436,946 to South Pekin Pedestrian and Bicyclist Facility project.

As these projects move ahead, as with all SWRTPO Board funded bike/pedestrian projects, CWCOC staff tracks progress towards completion and provides local agencies with assistance as needed.

Target Zero

The Washington State Highway Safety Plan known as Target Zero aims to reduce the number of traffic deaths and serious injuries on state roads. The program is data driven and focuses on influencing behavior before it occurs. At the local level the Target Zero program, facilitated by regional Target Zero Managers, is implemented by working with regional stakeholders to identify areas of local traffic safety concerns and identify solutions.

In September, the CWCOC finalized the contract with the Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) naming Rachelle Nugent as the newest Target Zero Manager for Region 3. The region's program has been in place since the early 2000's, and includes Cowlitz, Lewis, and Wahkiakum Counties.

The main priority in 2023 was to meet with stakeholders and learn the ins and outs of the Target Zero Program as quickly as possible. This included a three-day training in Wenatchee along with WTSC leadership, Target Zero Managers from across the state, and trainers from Montana State University to learn about the new scope of work; onboarding with different Target Zero regional and WTSC program managers learning the Washington Traffic Safety Commissions Enterprise Management System (WEMS) data dashboard system, as well as the Teens in the Driver Seat and High Visibility Enforcement (HVE) toolkit; and connecting with the two active local task forces in both Cowlitz and Lewis Counties.

As the program heads into 2024, the task forces will be working on traffic safety projects such as high visibility enforcement (HVE) for speed, DUI, distraction, and seatbelt use, teens in the driver seat, and child passenger safety.

TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS

Mobility Management

June of 2023 marked the end of the first funding period for the CWCOC Mobility Management Program. Deemed a success, WSDOT awarded an additional four years of funding to grow the program even further.

In 2023, staff created a new Trip Assistant website to help users locate resources for all their travel needs. It includes a trip planner, provider directory, and several other resources to help the community learn about the available public transportation options.

The trip planner allows the user to find the best services for a specific trip and apply filters to narrow their search. The Provider Directory holds information for over 50 transportation services and providers serving 17 counties all across Washington while a list of instructional videos produced by the CWCOC covers a range of topics to help the user navigate to their destination.

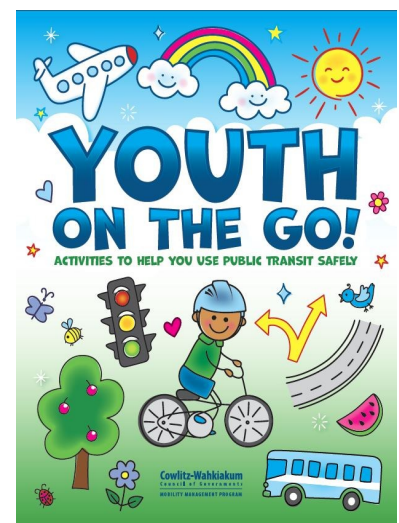


With the help of KLTV, a series of How to Ride videos was created for RiverCities Transit. These videos are posted on the CWCOC YouTube channel and walk through each step of utilizing the services RiverCities Transit offers. There are eight videos in total, each focusing on a different topic. The links are also available on the Trip Assistant website under the Learn to Ride tab.

Flag stop handouts were created to educate the community about how to safely flag down a bus and locate where designated flag stops are. Reflective slap bracelets were also included so they could be used to aid in flagging down the bus. These were created for RiverCities Transit, Pacific Transit, and Grays Harbor Transit.

Staff attended 16 community events to promote the program as well as the available public transportation services in the region. These events included back to school nights, hiring fairs, health resource fairs, career expos, community fairs, and Parent Teacher Association meetings.

A Youth Activity book was created to educate younger children about how to ride the bus safely as well as how to safely walk and roll to the bus stop. These books were distributed to all public transportation agencies in the region as well as a wide variety of human service agencies and nonprofits.



ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Spirit Lake Collaborative

The CWCOG began to fulfill what could turn into a long-term program for the organization in support of the work of the Spirit Lake-Toutle/Cowlitz River Collaborative. The CWCOG was named as the Administrative Coordinating Entity for the Spirit Lake-Toutle/Cowlitz River Collaborative through the Declaration of Cooperation initially signed by nineteen agencies in 2022. Funding acquired by the CWCOG through the Washington Department of Ecology assisted in the operations of the Collaborative through 2023.

The Declaration of Cooperation provides the mechanism for entities to agree that the SLTCRC provides a forum to:

- ◇ Develop and pursue an aspirational vision for the whole system.
- ◇ Work together on items that contribute to long-term management of the system and safety and economic well-being of downstream communities.
- ◇ Create a communication venue to exchange information, enhance understanding of system complexities and engage interested parties.
- ◇ Raise awareness of those interested or affected by sediment management in the system.
- ◇ Respond to requests from the U.S. Federal delegation, Washington State Legislature, and the Washington Governor on issues related to managing this complex system.

The SLTCRC has only begun to address the multitude of issues that have impacted the region for over forty years. Since the May 18, 1980, eruption of Mount St. Helens, the Spirit Lake-Toutle/Cowlitz River Basin residents have struggled with economic disruption, sediment, and flood risk issues. As part of the response to this event, the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine convened a Science Advisory Board (SAB) which produced *A Decision Framework for Managing the Spirit Lake and Toutle River System at Mount St. Helens*. The NASEM SAB saw the complexity of the administrative and jurisdictional environment and recommended “a framework for technical decision making related to long-term management of risks related to the Spirit Lake/Toutle River system in light of the different priorities of federal, tribal, state, relevant local authorities, and other entities. The multiple objectives of enhanced safety of the downstream communities and the protection of the local and regional ecology and economic activities will be integral to the framework and the ongoing work of the SLTCRC.

Broadband

The CWCOG Broadband Action Team (BAT) performed studies of the local region (Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties) taking note of key performance indicators of digital equity, access, and knowledge of internet usage and technological devices to better understand the correlation between broadband and the current economic status of the region. The BAT also performed outreach to collect this data as well as inquire on the digital equity needs in the area for minorities, youth, retirees, veterans etc. This outreach entailed email surveys, phone interviews, and local outreach.

After the outreach in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum was conducted, staff compiled all findings and information into the Washington State Extension Broadband Workbooks that were requested for submission. The findings of those workbooks influenced what Washington State Government used to request and allocate broadband funding for projects and initiatives to bridge the gaps and needs of the internet for all. The state ultimately received \$1.2 billion in funding to support ongoing broadband and digital equity work.

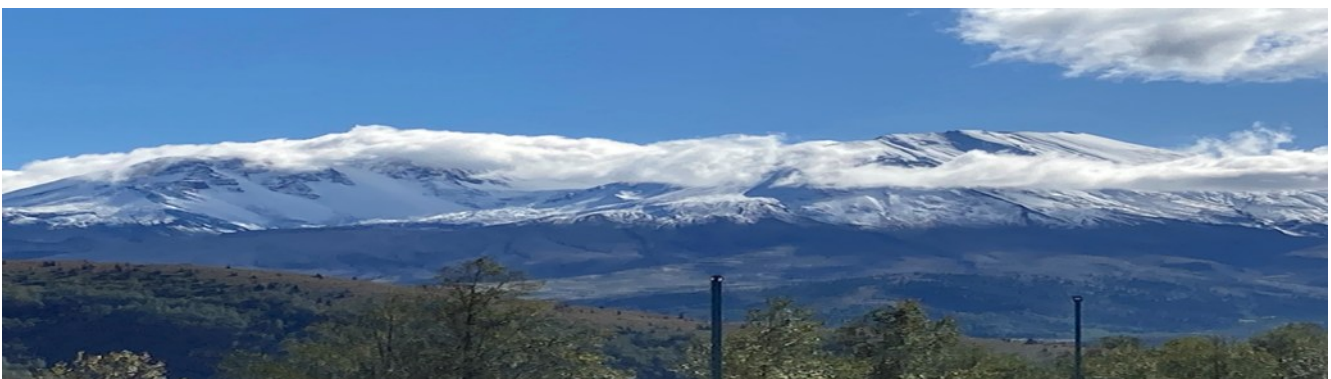
STAFF

Bill Fashing, Executive Director
 Monica Seidl, Project Specialist
 Rachelle Nugent, Target Zero Manager/HR
 Penny Newton, Project Assistant
 Sean Nugent, Finance Assistant

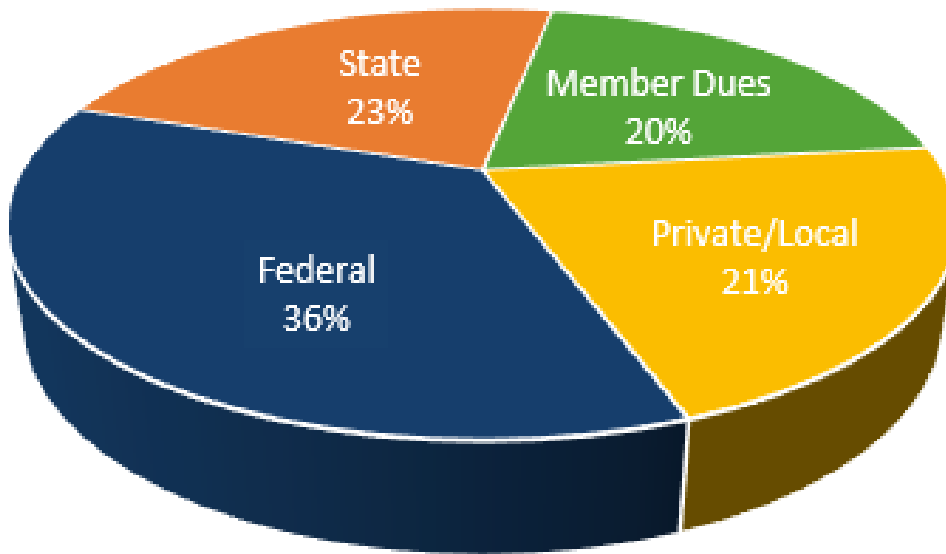
Anisa Kisamore, Administrative Director
 Robert Stevens, Transportation Planner
 Gabe Reese, Transportation Planning Technician
 Brandon Robinson, Economic Development Planner*
 Lauren Read, Mobility Management Coordinator*

MEMBERSHIP

General Members	Associate Members	Affiliate Members
Cowlitz County	911 Public Authority	City of Battle Ground
Wahkiakum County	City of Rainier Oregon	City of Camas
City of Castle Rock	Cowlitz Economic Development Council	City of Washougal
City of Kalama	Cowlitz Transit Authority	
City of Kelso	Housing Opportunities of SW Washington	
City of Longview	Kelso-Longview Chamber of Commerce	
City of Woodland	Lower Columbia College	
Town of Cathlamet	Lower Columbia Community Action Council	
	Wahkiakum Chamber	
Special Members		
Cowlitz County PUD	Port of Kalama	Castle Rock School District
Wahkiakum PUD 1	Port of Longview	Kalama School District
Cowlitz 2 Fire and Rescue	Port of Wahkiakum District 1	Kelso School District
Cowlitz County Fire Dist 1	Port of Woodland	Longview School District
Cowlitz County Fire Dist 5	Three Rivers Regional Wastewater Authority	Woodland School District
	Beacon Hill Water & Sewer District	



FINANCIAL REPORT

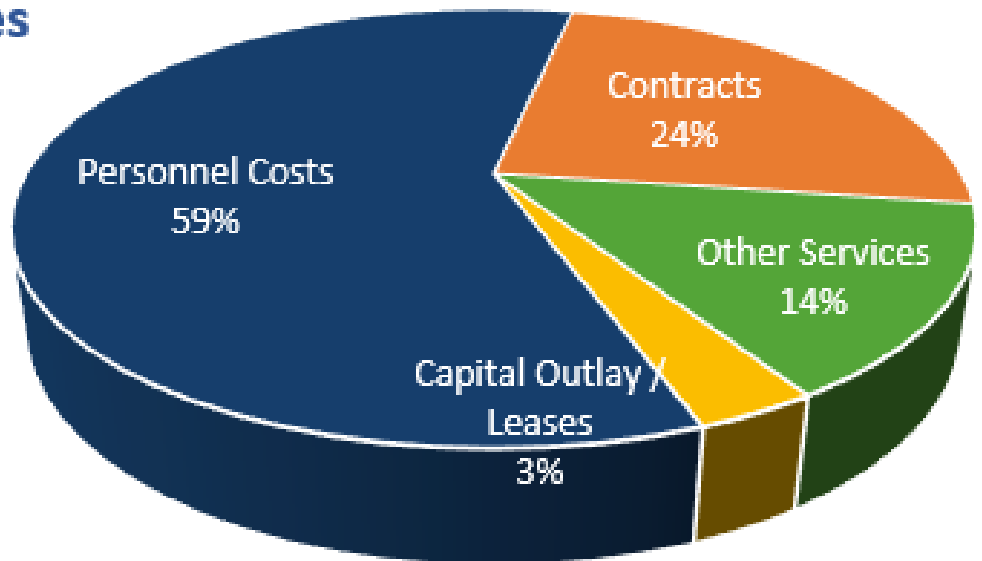


2023 Revenues \$1,381,711

Federal	494,727
State	314,649
Member Dues	278,442
Private/Local	293,893
Total Revenues	1,381,711

2023 Expenditures \$1,281,061

Personnel Costs	754,706
Contracts	305,757
Other Services	178,230
Capital Outlay / Leases	42,368
Total Expenditures	1,281,061



Beginning Fund Balance	573,428
Revenues	1,381,711
Expenditures	1,281,061
Unreserve Funds	600,000
Ending Fund Balance	674,078