



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments
And Lower Connecticut River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

DRAFT MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING May 28, 2025 – 9:00 AM

RiverCOG Members;

Chester: Cindy Lignar *
Clinton: Michelle Benivegna
Cromwell: Anthony Salvatore *
Deep River: Carol Doak-Jones *
Durham: Brendan Rea *
East Haddam: Irene Haines *
East Hampton: David Cox *
Essex: Carey Duques *
Haddam: Bob McGarry *
Killingworth: Eric Couture *
Lyme: David Lahm *
Middlefield: Robert Poturnicki* (alternate)
Middletown: Ben Florsheim *
Old Lyme: Katie Balocca * (alternate)
Old Saybrook: Carl Fortuna *
Portland: Michael Pelton*
Westbrook: John Hall *

MPO Members:

Darlene Briggs, Middlesex Chamber of Commerce:
Joe Comerford, Estuary & Middletown Area Transit Districts
Grayson Wright, CT DOT
Laurie McElwee, Regional Mobility Manager
Jennifer Brady, FHWA

*Present

Others Present:

Nicole Velardi, DEHMS
Carol Conklin, Regional Election Advisor
Julia McGrath, Congressman Courtney's Office
Hannah Brockhaus, FHI Studio, now IMEG
Michael Ahillen, FHI Studio, now IMEG
Scott Choquette, Dewberry Engineers
David Murphy, Resilient Land and Water

Staff Present:

RiverCOG

Sam Gold, Kevin Armstrong, Janice Ehle-Meyer, Susie Beckman, Eliza LoPresti, Marcos Gonzalez, Robert Haramut, Margot Burns, Megan Jouflas, Brendan Geraghty, Paula Fernald

1. Roll Call and Introductions

Chair Salvatore called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. Mr. Gold called the roll.

2. Public Speaking – All MPO and COG Business Agenda Items

Chair Salvatore opened the floor for public comments on all business items.

a. DEMHS Report – Nicole Velardi

Nicole Velardi from DEMHS Region 2 provided an update. She reported that as of that day, no federal notices of funding opportunity (NOFOs) had been issued for the 2025 Homeland Security Grant Program or Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG), though they had been expected by mid-May. The REPT steering committee continues to manage current grant balances and is preparing budgets to be ready once the NOFOs are released.

The next REPT Steering Committee meeting is scheduled for Friday, June 20, 2025, and will be held virtually. Velardi noted that MOAs for the 2024 Homeland Security Grant Program were distributed and are due to Elizabeth Matuska at the East Shore District Health Department by September 30, 2025.

She emphasized the opportunity for municipalities to receive free cybersecurity assessments conducted in partnership with the National Guard. These are available to K–12 school districts, public health and water/wastewater districts, and COGs. Assessments will occur through July, but the registration deadline was noted as May 31, 2025.

Municipalities participating in the 2022 EMPG program were reminded that reimbursement submissions are due by June 3, 2025. Additionally, the notice of grant awards for the 2024 EMPG program must also be signed and uploaded by that date.

Velardi shared that the first of three planned mass care and sheltering tabletop exercises was held in New Haven on May 21, and additional sessions are being scheduled. A targeted violence and terrorism prevention symposium will be held on August 1 at KIPNET.

She concluded by reminding municipalities that hurricane season begins June 1 and encouraged preparation efforts. There were no questions following her report.

b. Regional Election Update – Carol Conklin

Carol Conklin reported updates from the Secretary of State's Office regarding the transition of new voting equipment to municipalities. While initial documents referred to leases, she clarified the intent was to gift the equipment. Corrected paperwork will soon replace the interim lease documents.

She also noted that few legislative bills related to elections that could offer savings for small towns were advanced this session and encouraged members to advocate for these issues.

Conklin explained that municipalities receiving new equipment first were those holding referenda. She had assisted several towns during the initial rollouts and reported positive feedback. Comments from Deep River and Haddam officials supported her assessment, noting the equipment's ease of use and improved reporting features.

c. Congressional Update – Julia McGrath (Rep. Courtney's Office)

Julia McGrath summarized several federal developments. She reported that the House passed HR1 with a slim margin of 215–214; Rep. Courtney voted against it. She shared resources including the Congressman's statement and budget analyses. The White House released a preliminary FY26 budget, and she provided a NACo breakdown relevant to local governments.

She announced that applications were open for USDA local food programs until June 27 and for FEMA's SAFER grant for fire staffing and safety until July 3. She noted the DOT's bus and low-emission grant programs remain highly competitive but align well with the region's priorities.

She concluded by requesting feedback from COG members on priorities for the upcoming Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act, which although not legislated until FY26, was currently accepting recommendations. Council members engaged briefly on potential uses of the SAFER grant, with McGrath agreeing to follow up with more information.

Public Acknowledgment

Chair Salvatore took a moment to recognize Mayor Ben Florsheim, who will be stepping down from his role. He expressed gratitude for the mayor's contributions to the Council, emphasizing that he will be missed. Mayor Florsheim thanked members and staff, noting that his time working with RiverCOG was a professional highlight. Mr. Gold also recognized the mayor's instrumental role in the successful merger of Middletown Area Transit and 9-Town Transit.

3. LCRVMPO Business

a. Approval of Minutes of the April 23, 2025, LCRVCOG and LCRVMPO Meeting (motion)

MOTION: A motion to approve the April 23, 2025, meeting minutes was made by Mr. Couture; seconded by Mr. Cox.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously, with no corrections.

b. 2025 TIP Amendment 09

Rob Haramut presented several TIP amendments:

I. Haddam, RT82/RT154, 0060-0160, STPH, X7, Replace two T-type intersections with roundabouts with BR 00622, CON, 2025, \$0, 80/20/0, AC Entry, New project

II. Haddam, RT82/RT154, 0060-0160, STPH, X7, Replace two T-type intersections with roundabouts with BR 00622, CON, 2025, \$1,216,000, 80/20/0, AC Conversion, New project

This long-standing project involves replacing two T-type intersections with roundabouts and improving Bridge 00622. One line item (A/C entry) was for administrative entry at \$0; the second (A/C conversion) included \$1.216 million in funding.

MOTION: A motion to approve TIP 09 Amendments I and II was made by Ms. Haines; seconded by Mr. Cox

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously

III. Cromwell, RT9, 0171-0508, NHPP, X6, Roadway illumination improvements (site 3), CON, 2026, \$2,701,000, 80/20/0, New project

This \$2.7 million project under the National Highway Performance Program will replace roadway lighting. Rob explained Cromwell's segment involves new installation, qualifying it for NHPP funding, unlike other segments under the Carbon Reduction Program.

MOTION: A motion to approve TIP 09 Amendment III was made by Ms. Haines; seconded by Mr. Cox

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously

IV. Brooklyn, Colchester, East Hampton, Harwinton, Mansfield, Putnam, Stonington, Winchester, Various, 0170-3749, CRPSU, X6, Detection upgrades at various urban area traffic signals, CON, 2026, \$1,090,000, New Project

This \$1.09 million project will replace in-road loop detectors with 360° cameras and dilemma zone radar at signals. The RiverCOG region's portion is limited to East Hampton at Route 151.

MOTION: A motion to approve TIP 09 Amendment IV was made by Mr. Cox; seconded by Mr. Couture

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously

V. Statewide, 0170-3780, HSIP, X6, Traffic Safety Analytics – CRSMS, PL, 2025, \$0, 100/0/0, AC Entry (S154), New project

VI. Statewide, 0170-3780, HSIP, X6, Traffic Safety Analytics – CRSMS, PL, 2025, \$2,100,000. 100/0/0, AC Conversion (S154), New project

VII. Statewide, 0170-3780, HSIP, X6, Traffic Safety Analytics – CRSMS, PL, 2026, \$2,100,000. 100/0/0, AC Conversion (S154), New project

VIII. Statewide, 0170-3780, HSIP, X6, Traffic Safety Analytics – CRSMS, PL, 2027, \$2,100,000. 100/0/0, AC Conversion (S154), New project

IV. Statewide, 0170-3780, HSIP, X6, Traffic Safety Analytics – CRSMS, PL, 2028, \$2,100,000. 100/0/0, AC Conversion (S154), New project

X. Statewide, 0170-3780, HSIP, X6, Traffic Safety Analytics – CRSMS, PL, FYI, \$2,100,000. 100/0/0, AC Conversion (S154), New project

A multi-year, data-driven safety analysis initiative using Highway Safety Manual methodology, operated via UConn's web-based platform. Annual phases from 2025–2029 each allocate \$2.1 million in HSIP funds.

MOTION: A motion to approve TIP 09 Amendments V-X was made by Mr. Cox; second by Mr. Hall

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

c. Endorsement of 2026–2027 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

Mr. Haramut presented the draft UPWP, currently in a public comment period ending June 10. The plan outlines the MPO's transportation planning tasks and priorities over two fiscal years. Mr. Haramut highlighted core areas including staff roles, planning goals, data collection, public engagement, and special studies such as hazard mitigation.

Three resolutions were presented and adopted:

1. **UPWP Resolution**

Motion: Mr. Cox

Second: Mr. McGarry

Vote: Unanimous

2. **Roles & Responsibilities Resolution**

Motion: Mr. Cox

Second: Mr. Fortuna

Vote: Unanimous

3. **Authorizing Resolution**

Motion: Ms. Lignar

Second: Mr. Cox

Vote: Unanimous

d. SS4A Presentation – Hannah Brockhaus (FHI Studio, now IMEG)

Hannah Brockhaus presented the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) update. She confirmed the regional vision of zero traffic fatalities or serious injuries by 2045. The action plan has three guiding goals:

- Prioritize safety improvements,
- Collaborate regionally and publicly,
- Improve data and monitoring systems.

She shared that 24 high-injury corridors were identified using crash data. Field assessments were underway at 10 sites that day, and three of those will be selected for concept designs. Municipal safety profiles are being drafted to help towns pursue implementation grants.

e. Other Transportation

TranSearch Freight Data Purchase (added agenda item)

MOTION: A motion to add the purchase of TranSearch Freight Data to the agenda was made by Mr. Cox; second by Mr. Fortuna

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Haramut requested permission to use FY24–25 PL funds to join six other COGs in purchasing TranSearch data for regional freight planning. The cost to RiverCOG would be \$16,750.

MOTION: A motion to approve the purchase of TranSearch Freight Data was made by Mr. Cox; second by Mr. Fortuna

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

4. LCRVCOG Business

a. FY26 Draft Budget

Mr. Gold reported that the draft budget is pending final funding figures, expected after the legislative session ends. The Executive Committee will receive a copy of the draft budget by June 10th, for review at the next Executive Committee Meeting on June 17th, with full board adoption planned for June 25th. He noted that HB5002 (Omnibus Housing Bill) may bring new funding for COG staffing.

b. Legislative Update

Sam shared concerns about HB5002, especially its removal of municipal authority to require parking in residential developments. He explained the implications for accessibility and local zoning. He also questioned the bill's effectiveness given the continued presence of Section 8-30g, which allows developers to bypass zoning.

Other legislative items included:

- Veterans tax abatement fix remains uncertain.
- Parks & Recreation bill would require background checks and medical staff, creating challenges for seasonal hiring.

Mr. Gold cautioned that items not passed could still appear in the budget implementer bill.

i. Southeast COG Proposal

Mr. Gold briefly reported that Southeast COG's elected officials had requested meetings with General Assembly leadership to discuss a proposal that would impose supermajority vote requirements on the legislature when introducing new municipal mandates or tax abatements. The initiative was particularly motivated by frustration over the veterans' tax abatement from the previous session.

Mr. Gold attended one of these meetings with legislative leaders, including the House Minority Leader, and conveyed that while the idea had merit and likely enjoyed widespread municipal support, it was introduced late in the session and was unlikely to move forward this year.

5. Chairman's and Executive Director's Reports

Financial Report

Mr. Gold provided a brief financial report for the Council's operations as of April 30, 2025, which marked 10 months into the fiscal year.

Key highlights included:

- Overall spending was within budget for the \$3.2 million annual budget.
- The service contracts and fees line item had exceeded projections, largely due to the use of a temp agency to hire a financial assistant. However, the contract ended once the individual was hired full-time by RiverCOG.
- Travel expenses also exceeded budget but would be offset by savings in other categories.
- Miscellaneous expenses were running at 92% of budgeted levels, slightly ahead of the expected 83% for this point in the year, but still projected to close under budget by year-end.
- As of April 30:
 - STIF account balance: \$1.8 million
 - Liberty Bank checking account balance: \$121,893

Mr. Gold concluded by stating that RiverCOG was in "good shape financially."

6. Other Business

a. Next Meeting

The next COG meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 25, 2025, and will be held in person.

Ms. Rolison presented the Florence Griswold Museum as a proposed venue for the upcoming meeting. The space can accommodate up to 32 attendees at round tables or up to 50 in a classroom-style arrangement. The Museum will provide complimentary admission and self-guided tours, with the option to arrange private, docent-led tours for an additional \$100. The meeting is planned in a luncheon format, beginning at 11:30 a.m. It was agreed that the June 25, 2025, COG/MPO meeting will be held at this location.

7. Adjournment

MOTION: A motion to adjourn the COG MPO meeting was made by Mr. Cox; second by Ms. Doak-Jones

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 a.m. and was followed by the 2025–2026 Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Kickoff Meeting for the 15 participating RiverCOG municipalities."

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Rolison