

Findings and
Recommendations

Connecticut's Regional Planning Organizations

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Legislative Program Review
& Investigations Committee

Introduction

Regional Planning Organizations

In Connecticut, Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs) are statutorily authorized entities voluntarily established by towns within 15 state-defined logical planning regions. (See Appendix A for a map showing the boundaries of the regions.) All but one municipality in the state is a member of a Regional Planning Organization. There are three types of RPOs -- Regional Councils of Elected Officials (RCEOs), Regional Councils of Governments (RCOGs), and Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs). All have similar duties, which can be summarized as:

- providing a forum for intermunicipal discussion of a variety of issues affecting member towns;
- facilitating preparation of a regional development plan that considers a broad range of matters including land use, housing, economic development, the environment, recreational areas, and public utilities;
- reviewing and commenting on various matters related to land use, including certain zone use and subdivision changes as well as local and state conservation and development plans;
- performing transportation planning activities related to federal funding; and
- assisting member towns with specific tasks identified by the towns, including coordination of regional purchasing opportunities and service sharing agreements.

In April 2007, the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee voted to study Connecticut's Regional Planning Organizations. The focus of the study was on understanding the activities currently undertaken by each of the 15 RPOs, identifying additional services they might provide in the future, suggesting ways to encourage regional collaboration among municipalities, and indicating whether a particular model exists that fosters the concept of regionalism.

Summary of Study Issues

In recent years, there has been growing interest nationally and in Connecticut in expanding efforts to plan and act on a regional basis. There are two major reasons for this trend in Connecticut.

The first reason is a recognition that land use planning needs to occur in a more methodical and integrated manner in order to preserve the character of the state and reduce sprawl. Neither RPOs nor state government currently has the authority to overrule land use decisions made at the local level. Because of this autonomy, towns do not have to follow conservation and development plans that are prepared at the state and regional level. In response to this situation, state level efforts are focused increasingly on linking state funding for capital and infrastructure projects with promotion of Responsible Growth land use at the local level.

Rather than changing authority for land use decisions, the state is trying to discourage decisions that are not compatible with the State Plan of Conservation and Development (State C&D Plan).

The second reason for this trend is a realization that service sharing arrangements can achieve cost savings. This is important as municipalities face increasing pressure to control local budgets and contain rising property taxes. Because of these cost savings, such efforts help towns maintain the service levels they deliver to their residents.

Although efforts to regionalize have been underway in Connecticut for more than 50 years, the number and range of activities undertaken regionally has increased in recent years. Towns are working together, often through the Regional Planning Organizations, to buy equipment, operate animal shelters, promote recreational facilities, plan for natural disasters and other emergencies, protect the environment, and administer transit programs. Projects that involve working with private parties jointly to develop a specific parcel of land or operate a regional facility are much more limited. In any case, the extent to which individual towns or groups of neighboring towns are embracing regionalism varies, and efforts to expand regionalism in Connecticut should be considered within the context of existing beliefs and practices.

The characteristics of a group purchasing or service delivery effort are important factors in a town's decision to regionalize that activity. Often, towns are more willing to work jointly with others when the services to be provided are those that do not involve direct contact between the town and its citizens. This includes activities in the areas of information technology, the processing of bills, and property tax revaluation assessments. Other popular efforts focus on opportunities for towns to obtain enhanced services at the same cost as going it alone. These types of projects include joint purchasing of office supplies and employment training programs. A third category with strong potential for a regional approach is recruitment of personnel for jobs that are difficult to fill because of a shortage of skilled workers or the need to combine tasks among several towns in order to create a full-time position.

Another factor affecting the willingness of towns to enter into regional ventures is the number of other entities that will be involved. Some smaller towns fear they will lose their identity within a group of larger towns, while larger towns may worry that their concerns will be lost in the diversity of issues raised by a large number of smaller towns. The fact that the 15 RPOs currently operating in Connecticut have good working relationships among most of their members would suggest these concerns can be resolved.

In some towns, local officials are concerned about a loss of autonomy, if their town joins an effort they cannot control completely. They worry that even if they agree with a decision now, in the future they might find their town is required to give up revenue or provide a service or an increased level of service that they would not have chosen. An example of this situation is the purchase of group health insurance for employees. The entity representing the region may negotiate a more generous package of benefits than the town wants to provide. Even though the cost of those benefits might be the same initially as the amount the town was paying for more limited benefits (due to the group purchasing discount), in the future the town might find it difficult to reduce benefits, if the price rises.

The other side of the issue of costs concerns the willingness of the citizens of a town to pay higher taxes in order to receive more benefits. Theoretically, all towns want to save money, if they can. Sometimes though, the cost of a particular structure or service is not high enough for town residents to be willing to make a change in the frequency or the scope of that project, even if it would save money. For example, people often prefer to use a library within their own community or visit their local town hall for required permits and licenses.

In those types of situations, the property tax burden on the individuals in the town that goes it alone can become very heavy. However, until the town reaches a financial tipping point where efforts to balance the provision of services with the cost of those services cannot be maintained, there may be little desire to seek out a regional solution. Only then will the town and its citizens be ready to give up some independence and join together with other towns for the provision of goods and services in order to stabilize or reduce local property taxes.

In the case of towns that are reluctant to readily participate in regional endeavors, the state can take action in three ways. It can offer incentives, which would be primarily financial, but could include technical assistance. At the same time, or as an alternative, the state could impose sanctions in the form of disqualification for a wide range of state grants or the imposition of a fee for acting alone. (These choices are sometimes referred to as the “carrot or stick” approach.) The most drastic state approach would be to mandate certain activities or functions that are currently performed on a town-by-town basis be regionalized.

The availability of financial incentives might motivate towns to join cooperative efforts, but new money is not always the answer. Towns may be willing to forego cost savings in order to be able to locate a building where they want it or continue the provision of a service in the way they want. For example, financial incentives to encourage towns to form regional Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) have had mixed results. Some towns that receive few “911” calls are still reluctant to eliminate the job of the employee who currently handles that function. In such cases, it may be necessary for the state to threaten to eliminate access to all state funds for that program in order to get a town to participate in a regional center with neighboring towns.

The decision about what sanctions to impose and when to impose them should be considered in the context of the goals of the particular program. Harsh penalties in areas where the returns are small run the risk of generating resentment toward the targeted effort and a general loss in the level of goodwill achieved to date through voluntary regional efforts.

As Connecticut seeks to achieve greater regionalism in the area of government activities, the state must decide whether the nature and pace of the efforts currently underway are moving in the right direction, or whether stronger mandates or sanctions are needed. Executive Order No. 15 issued in 2006 and a number of initiatives adopted during the 2007 legislative session are specifically aimed at encouraging detailed discussions about how to implement the responsible growth principles identified in the State C&D Plan. These efforts seek to promote greater regional awareness about land use issues and encourage service sharing arrangements through RPOs. At the same time, the Office of Responsible Growth within OPM and a new task force, which includes representatives of multiple state agencies as well as private citizens, are currently examining how state investment dollars can influence conservation and development efforts at the local level and whether land use laws, policies, or programs need to be changed.

Since those activities are still underway, the program review committee believes it is appropriate to allow some additional time to pass to see if the results of those efforts are successful. Consequently, instead of recommending a single regional model, the committee is proposing a series of revisions that modify elements of the Regional Planning Organizations, the role of OPM in regional efforts, and the use of state funding as a means of increasing regional activities. Section II of this document contains a more detailed discussion of the issues related to regionalism and includes all of the committee's recommendations.

Methodology

Information about Regional Planning Organizations was obtained from a variety of sources. Program review staff read historic materials (e.g., annual reports, plans, and histories) prepared by individual RPOs as well as the associations that have represented the RPOs over the years, viewed the web sites of the 13 RPOs that have web pages, and reviewed the most recent financial audit that each RPO filed with OPM. Committee staff also visited the office of each of the 15 RPOs, interviewing the executive director, and in some cases, other staff and board members as well.

In conjunction with two other program review studies, an electronic survey was sent to the chief elected officials of all municipalities in the state. The section of the survey related to the RPO study included questions about why towns belong to RPOs, what functions RPOs should perform, who should serve on the boards of directors, and what the state should do to encourage more regional cooperation. A total of 101 of 169 forms were returned, for a response rate of 60 percent. Section I summarizes the responses to the questions, while Appendix B contains a copy of the survey instrument.

During the course of the study, program review committee staff spoke with nonpartisan staff from other legislative offices (i.e., Office of Fiscal Analysis, Office of Legislative Research, and Legislative Commissioners Office). Committee staff also met with employees of the Office of Policy and Management, the Departments of Environmental Protection and Transportation, the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), the Connecticut Organization of Small Towns (COST), and the Regional Plan Association as well as a representative of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association.

Program review staff attended several bi-monthly meetings of OPM and the RPOs, which were followed by meetings of the Connecticut Association of Regional Planning Organizations (CARPO), as well as meetings of the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) and the Responsible Growth Task Force. Committee staff also attended: in March, a legislative forum on Smart Growth Policy Trends; in April, a community forum on the regional collaboration project "People, Prosperity, and Place;" in July, the annual meeting of the Connecticut 1,000 Friends; and in October, a half-day Shared Services Symposium sponsored by OPM and ACIR; and in December, a regional forum on the state's economic strategic plan sponsored by the Department of Economic and Community Development.

On September 25, 2007, the program review committee held a public hearing regarding the issues in this and two other studies. A total of 16 people spoke or submitted testimony

related to the topic of Regional Planning Organizations, including a panel presentation by the staff and board members of eight of the RPOs.

Information about the history of the RPOs was obtained from the legislative record, previous studies of RPOs in Connecticut, and conversations with individuals involved in the creation of logical planning regions in Connecticut. Various national sources and literature about regional government, conservation and development planning and its relationship to Smart Growth efforts, and joint purchasing efforts were also examined.

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Section I

Survey of Municipal Chief Elected Officials

The legislative program review committee surveyed municipal chief elected officials to gather their opinions on three studies being conducted by the committee -- Regional Planning Organizations in Connecticut, Homeland Security in Connecticut, and the State's Long-Term Planning Efforts. The survey contained 20 questions, of which 10 were directly related to RPOs. As part of the survey, municipal chief elected officials were asked their opinion regarding the roles and responsibilities of RPOs in their region, the current performance of the RPOs in their region, and what future tasks, if any, they would like RPOs to undertake in their region. This section highlights the survey results. (A copy of the survey instrument and response totals are contained in Appendix B.)

The committee sent surveys to the chief elected official in each of Connecticut's 169 towns; 101 (or 60 percent) were returned. Although the committee received 101 responses, it is important to note that not every question was answered by all respondents so the response rates vary from question to question.

Survey Results

Based on the results of the survey, it is clear that municipal chief elected officials would like more opportunities to pursue joint service sharing, although they do not want any state mandates requiring them to do so. Furthermore, most of those that wanted to take advantage of joint opportunities cited funding from the state as the number one incentive that would promote this concept. On the other hand, there still was a strong sentiment stressing the voluntary nature of such agreements, and that authority should still rest with local officials on whether or not to come together jointly or go it alone.

Reasons towns join a Regional Planning Organization. A primary purpose of the program review committee's study is to examine how RPOs can be used to encourage towns to come together and provide certain services on a regional rather than a town basis thereby sharing costs. To gain an understanding of why towns currently belong to RPOs, the committee asked municipal chief elected officials to identify, from a list of options, the reasons that their town belonged to the RPO in their planning area. The responses are shown in Table I-1.

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Percent Selecting Answer</i>
To address issues that cross town boundaries	97%
Facilitate the sharing of services	75%
Improve the way land use decisions are made	61%
Address concerns about environmental issues	58%
Enable town to purchase a item with other towns that it could not afford to buy itself	46%
Make group purchases at a reduced price	43%

Source: PRI Database.

In addition, 27 percent of the chief elected officials provided “other” responses to this question. These responses ranged from the broad (promote cooperation and problem solving) to the specific (discuss homeland security and transportation issues). Other reasons cited by the chief elected officials included: prioritize municipal issues to lobby legislature, address solid waste disposal and recycling issues, and coordinate economic development.

Functions of RPOs. One group of survey questions listed a variety of functions and activities that RPOs could perform in their regions, and chief elected officials were asked to agree or disagree whether they believed, in general, that RPOs should perform these functions. All of the 95 chief elected officials who responded to the question about whether RPOs should review and comment on state development projects that affect their regions agreed they should, and most (91 percent) agreed that RPOs should create and adopt regional plans of development. To a lesser extent (84 percent), the responding chief elected officials agreed that one of the functions of RPOs is to assist with the preparation of municipal conservation and development plans.

There was also general agreement among chief elected officials regarding the role RPOs should have in reviewing and commenting on local projects with potential for regional impact. Table I-2 shows that most agreed that RPOs should review and comment on local zoning projects with regional significance. Currently, this is the only type of project of the three listed in the table that RPOs have not been granted statutory authority to do, although it has been proposed numerous times in legislation since the early 1980s.

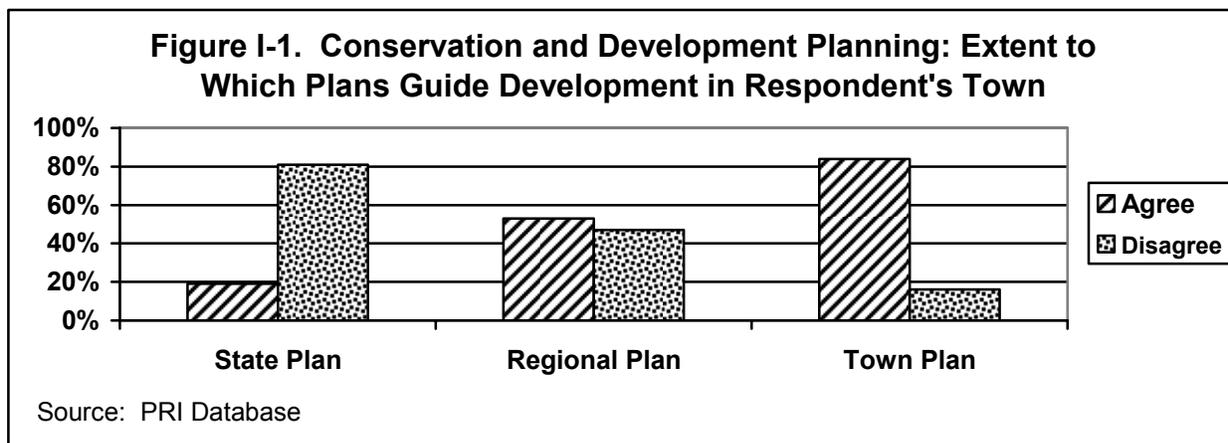
Table I -2. RPO Input on Local Projects with Potential for Regional Impact		
<i>Review and Comment on Local Projects</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
RPOs should review and comment on LOCAL zoning projects with regional significance (N=91)	92%	8%
RPOs should review and comment on proposed subdivisions that abut or include land in two or more towns (N=92)	91%	9%
RPOs should review and comment on proposed zone use or zone use changes within 500 feet of another town boundary (N=92)	89%	11%
Source: PRI Database.		

Other functions for which there was widespread agreement among chief elected officials that RPOs should perform were in the areas of transportation planning, any tasks that member towns collectively choose, and creating economic development strategies for their regions.

There was less agreement in the survey responses on whether RPOs should assist in the development of zoning regulations for individual towns (26 percent of 90 respondents disagreed); discuss affordable housing issues (18 percent of 90 respondents disagreed); and coordinate emergency management and homeland security efforts (14 percent of 92 respondents disagreed).

Conservation and development planning. With respect to conservation and development planning activities in Connecticut, Figure I-1 shows the percent of survey

respondents agreeing or disagreeing with how much conservation and development within their town is guided by each of the three levels of development plans. As the figure shows, the vast majority of respondents (81 percent) did not believe that the State C&D Plan is used extensively to guide development in their town. Survey respondents were split on the regional plans, with slightly more than half agreeing that regional plans of development reflect the development issues in their town. In terms of their own local plans of conservation and development, although most believed that their town's plan was effective in guiding development within their town, 16 percent of the respondents disagreed.



The lack of consistency between local and regional plans of conservation and development and the State C&D Plan has been cited often since the 1980s. Currently, the law requires that inconsistencies with the State C&D Plan be noted in the local or regional plan, but OPM cannot require these plans be changed. One survey question asked chief elected officials whether development projects within a town should be required to comply with the State C&D Plan -- one-third of the 85 respondents agreed, and two-thirds disagreed.

RPO membership. Chief elected officials were asked several questions about the boundaries of the existing regional planning areas. The responses indicate that a majority of the 87 respondents (68 percent) believe that eligibility for membership in an RPO should be limited to the state-defined boundaries. However, 93 percent of 89 respondents agreed that these boundaries should be re-evaluated periodically.

Since the type of RPO selected by the member towns determines whether there are chief elected officials or planners on the RPO board, the survey included two questions regarding board composition. Responses indicate:

- slightly more than half of 89 respondents (55 percent) agreed that chief elected officials should be required to serve on the board of the RPO in their area; and
- 64 percent of 86 respondents agreed at least one individual serving on the RPO board should have planning experience.

RPO current efforts and future responsibilities. The committee survey asked chief elected officials to describe the efforts of the RPO in their regions. Of the 91 chief elected officials that responded to the question, 81 percent rated the RPO performance as excellent or good, while 13 percent rated it fair, and 6 percent rated it poor.

Fifty-one of the survey respondents gave written responses to an open-ended survey question that asked what, if any, additional functions they would like the RPO in their region to perform. Of the total responses received, 10 stated no changes were needed. Common areas where respondents suggested RPOs should take on additional functions included economic development planning; affordable housing planning; promoting service sharing and joint purchasing agreements among member towns; and water supply planning. One respondent suggested that RPOs be given the authority to levy a regional tax or to share in a percent of the sales tax in that region.

Promoting regional cooperation. Most respondents (87 percent of 92) believe the state of Connecticut should provide incentives to encourage more regional cooperation. For those responding positively, the survey contained an open ended question asking specifically what types of incentives the state could provide that would encourage towns to participate in more regional activities. Sixty-six of the chief elected officials provided written comments on how to encourage towns to engage in more regional activities. The suggestions included:

- give grants to prepare conservation and development plans;
- allow revenue sharing (i.e., sales tax revenue should be dedicated to regional activities);
- provide start-up or seed money;
- present information and explain how centralization would work, while allowing towns to maintain their identity and autonomy;
- provide more money to RPOs to lead/promote efforts;
- provide monetary incentives to towns participating in regional activities; and
- encourage regional education.

A few chief elected officials either did not believe the state should provide funding, noting that it would eventually lead to unfunded mandates, or they wanted funding to bypass the RPO and go directly to the town.

Cooperative purchasing. Municipal chief elected officials also were surveyed on whether they used existing purchasing agreements and contracts negotiated by other entities. Of the 88 responses received, 92 percent stated that they used purchase agreements and contracts negotiated by the state of Connecticut; 60 percent used those offered by organizations such as the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities or the Capitol Region Education Council; 50 percent used those offered by their own RPO; 36 percent had direct agreements with one or more towns; and 26 percent used programs operated by other RPOs.

Chief elected officials were also asked about participating in several specific purchasing or service delivery opportunities in the future. Almost all of the 88 respondents (92 percent)

would be interested in participating in cooperative purchasing agreements in the future, while 83 percent were interested in buying equipment with other towns to share. The listed area with the least interest shown, although still a majority, was in sharing the use and expenses of recreational facilities located in another town -- only 60 percent of respondents were interested.

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Findings and Recommendations

There are currently many efforts taking place at the state agency level, and among the state, regional entities, and local governments. The program review committee believes that building on these effort will allow participation in such activities to still be voluntary and recommends state dollars be targeted to encourage more of these region-wide initiatives to occur. In this way, the state can promote a regional perspective that contributes to the long-term development of Connecticut.

The overall goal of the recommendations contained in this section is to encourage local officials to continue to address issues through Regional Planning Organizations to foster the growth and development of the regions in the state. This section includes the program review committee findings and recommendations in three broad areas including:

- the role, structure, boundaries, and resources of Regional Planning Organizations;
- the relationship of the Office of Policy and Management to the continued growth of regionalism in Connecticut; and
- the use of state funding as a means of increasing regional activities.

Role of Regional Planning Organizations

The need to address certain public policy issues on a regional versus an individual town basis has been recognized in Connecticut since the 1940s when the state legislature authorized the creation of regional planning agencies. Since the first organized effort in 1948 by a few towns in South Central Connecticut, which established the South Central Regional Planning Authority, every single town in Connecticut, except one, has joined a Regional Planning Organization. As noted in the September briefing, however, the scope of the tasks undertaken by the 15 RPOs for their member towns is dependent on financial and staffing resources, which vary greatly among RPOs. *With the exception of transportation planning, which already has a regional focus, and a few state-mandated responsibilities related to conservation and development planning, most of the activities performed by the RPOs are at the direction of their member towns.*

Since 1999, at least a half dozen studies have examined Connecticut's social, physical, and economic conditions and made recommendations that call for a broader regional role, if Connecticut is to avoid the risk of economic decline.¹ The studies describe the impact that land use regulations have on the quality of life in Connecticut, and consequently, how this affects

¹ For example, see 1000 Friends of Connecticut, *Developing Connecticut's Economic Future*, Hartford, Connecticut; *Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Property Tax Burdens and Smart Growth Incentives* (October, 2002); Michael Gallis & Associates, *Economic Vitality and Land Use* (2003) and *Connecticut's Strategic Economic Framework* (1999); and Ameregis, *Connecticut Metropatterns: A Regional Agenda for Community and Prosperity in Connecticut*, 2003.

patterns of economic development, transportation, housing, and the environment. Most of the studies also cite the negative impact of local property tax in Connecticut, which causes towns to compete against each other for new development in order to sustain services by increasing their grand list totals. Thus, the studies conclude that limiting sprawl, yet keeping Connecticut economically viable and a desirable place to live, requires certain issues to be addressed at a regional level.

Over the years, the objective of state legislation related to regionalism has been to encourage, rather than require, towns to jointly cooperate. Towns have opportunities to work formally through statutorily authorized Regional Planning Organizations or other regional entities, or they can use permissive statutory language that allows not only two or more municipalities to join together to accomplish certain tasks, but also allows RPOs to join together for the same purposes.

More and more frequently in recent years, growing numbers of towns in Connecticut are entering into joint efforts with groups of towns outside the structure of the RPO for an ever widening array of purposes. A report by the Connecticut Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations in June 2000 identified dozens of types of programs that involve cooperative arrangements involving multiple towns. The report listed approximately 1,000 inter-municipal joint ventures, including education arrangements. When general government services alone were counted, there were 436 specific programs in 30 different categories.² Since then, additional programs have been started or expanded.

An examination of the ACIR report shows these efforts involve a variety of different approaches. Sometimes arrangements are headed by an RPO, other times by two or more towns, and still other times by an entirely different regional entity with different geographic boundaries than the RPOs.

One example of a successful joint effort that attracts towns from a wide geographic area is the voluntary purchasing cooperative called the Capitol Region Purchasing Council (CRPC). Although it is a program of the Capitol Region Council of Governments (an RPO), membership is open to municipalities, boards of education, and other governmental agencies throughout the state. The program currently has 67 participating members, including ones from 34 towns that are outside the boundaries of the capitol region. In FY 07, members saved an estimated \$1.5 million in total.³

There have been numerous studies done since the 1950s calling for greater regional cooperation, but beyond conservation and development planning requirements, no major mandates limiting local government authority have been enacted. Rather, the approach that state policy leaders have taken over the years has been to promote formation of Regional Planning Organizations. However, until recently, there has not been much state financial support for RPOs to address issues of a regional nature.

² Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, Local Government Cooperative Ventures in Connecticut, June 2000, pp. 1-5.

³ Capitol Region Council of Governments web page [[http:// www.crcog.org/purchasing%20_coun/member.html](http://www.crcog.org/purchasing%20_coun/member.html)], August 30, 2007.

Because of the structure of local government in Connecticut, with 169 municipal governments, a strong preference for home rule, and an aversion to unfunded state mandates, the state legislature has never granted RPOs the authority to override local land use decisions or empowered RPOs to address specific issues regarding housing or economic development on a region-wide level. *Thus, a major challenge for state policy makers is to balance regional needs that facilitate the long-term development of the state, with the long-held preference of retaining control and decision-making at the local level of government.*

Many individuals knowledgeable about public budget trends maintain that as local budget pressures build to very high levels, towns will be forced to act cooperatively by sharing services, or else they will be forced to raise taxes, or they will need to reduce the level of services provided to their residents. While the committee agrees that more cooperative arrangements will likely occur as municipal fiscal pressures increase, it is important that support for regional cooperation continue to increase, whether it is on an ad hoc basis involving a small number of towns or on a broader region-wide basis.

Based on interviews with individuals at the state, regional, and local levels involved in regional efforts and an analysis of the results of the program review committee's survey of municipal chief elected officials, *there is no consensus on whether the state should build the capacity of RPOs so they can undertake state-mandated tasks on a region-wide basis.* In addition, there was no agreement on whether certain land use decisions should be shifted away from municipalities to regional or state government. Most of those interviewed acknowledged that regional planning is important, and increasing collaboration among towns for the provision of certain services would be more cost efficient. However, almost all local officials opposed the idea of the state imposing mandates that would require specific functions and activities to be regionalized.

Instead, most local officials surveyed, as well as the RPO executive directors interviewed, believe the decision to identify services or functions to share with neighboring towns or a broader region should rest with local elected officials. In addition, most also said the state should provide greater incentives (such as the Regional Performance Incentive Program adopted last session) to encourage greater regional cooperation, but they cautioned against a "top-down" approach to regionalism.

Thus, the philosophical debate remains almost unchanged over the last 60 years – how much authority should regional entities in Connecticut be given. Figure II-1 shows a continuum of decision-making authority that ranges from strong local control to a state-recognized regional entity to strong state control.

At the top of the figure, there are no cooperative arrangements among towns; each town does everything on its own. The next stage involves voluntary efforts among a small number of neighboring towns, but there are no formal models to follow or outside financial incentives provided. As activities expand, successful projects get copied, and an entity such as a Regional Planning Organization can serve as the coordinator or administrator of the program.

FIGURE II-1. Continuum of Local/Regional/State Control

*Local
Control*

- Towns do everything by themselves
- Towns voluntarily work with neighboring towns
- RPOs organize groups of towns to participate in shared services/efforts/projects
- State offers incentives to towns that work together on tasks/projects
- State requires a minimum number of towns to join together on a task in order for any of them to receive funding
- State gives funding preference to RPOs that get a majority of their towns to participate as a region in grant programs
- State requires all towns in a geographic area to collectively carry out a task through its RPO
- State-establishes RPOs to operate as sub-state districts with independent revenue raising powers
- State performs specific tasks previously performed by town or region

*State
Control*

Source: LPR&IC Staff

As the continuum moves toward what is often described as a “top down” approach to regionalism, the state takes a more active role, ranging from offering incentives to towns for voluntary cooperation to providing funding only when specific results are achieved. At the next stage, RPOs could operate as sub-state districts with independent revenue raising powers. Other single-purpose regional entities could be consolidated into the strengthened RPOs, along with authority over certain land use decisions as well as administration and/or operation of certain region-wide functions. At the extreme, the state either performs the desired tasks itself.

The trend in recent years has been to move away from the extreme of towns going it entirely alone. Most towns in Connecticut have embraced the use of regional entities for some purposes, but there is less support for state-imposed joint efforts. At the same time, in Connecticut, the state takes on the role played by county and other regional entities in other states to the extent that state government operates jails, distributes assistance payments to needy families, and provides other types of social services.

The committee believes there are several obstacles to the establishment of stronger Regional Planning Organizations in Connecticut. The most significant barrier is ideological. Some individuals believe that local government is more responsive and service is of a higher quality at the local level, while others think planning and delivering services in 169 towns in Connecticut is costly, inefficient, and leads to poor land use decisions that encourage sprawl.

As mentioned previously, RPOs are currently authorized by the state, but must be established by local legislative bodies. To move to a stronger regional system, the committee believes that the state would need to:

- re-establish RPOs as state-created entities so that they are not dependent on approval of local legislative bodies for their existence and funding;
- mandate they be given region-wide authority for certain land use decisions and any other regional functions, including those currently performed by state agencies, other single-purpose regional entities, and local governments; and
- grant them independent taxing authority in order to generate revenue, or at least give them a set percentage of other tax revenues collected by state or local government.

Given that there appears to be no consensus for moving in this direction, the committee believes the current evolution of regional activity should be encouraged to continue. In order to promote additional efforts at a faster pace, the program review committee is proposing recommendations to adjust the existing RPO system.

Structure of Regional Planning Organizations

Today, three types of Regional Planning Organizations are authorized to operate in Connecticut -- Regional Councils of Governments, Regional Councils of Elected Officials, and Regional Planning Agencies. As detailed in the September briefing, the organizational structure of these entities has evolved since the 1940s, but the current distribution of seven RCOGs, three RCEOs, and five RPAs has existed since 2002.⁴

With respect to the RPO boards of directors, depending on the type of RPO structure adopted in a given region, the size, appointing authority, and type of appointees to the board will differ. Table II-1 summarizes the statutory provisions regarding the composition for the three types of RPOs.

⁴ Two RPAs have also formed a joint RCEO to enhance communication between the two regions, but it is not included in the count of RPOs.

TABLE II-1. Composition of RPO Boards.		
	<i>Regional Planning Agency</i>	<i>Regional Council of Elected Officials OR Regional Council of Governments</i>
Representation	2 per member town + 1 per 50,000 people (or fraction over 25,000)	1 per member town (except Hartford gets 4 seats, based on Special Act)
Selection of representatives	if planning commission exists, it appoints at least one representative; other representative(s) elected/appointed as town legislative body chooses	chief elected official of each member town; if none, representative selected by town's legislative body
Alternates	not mentioned	bylaws can provide for alternate representative
Source of data: Connecticut General Statutes		

As indicated in the table, the size of a RPA board is based on the populations of the towns located within its boundaries, and it includes representatives of the planning bodies within those towns. The RCEO and RCOG board memberships generally allow only one seat per member town, and that representative is the chief elected official, although alternates are allowed to attend for the chief elected official.⁵

The number of board members per existing RPO ranges from four to 32, with a median of 15. With the exception of the Capitol Region Council of Governments, where the city of Hartford gets three extra seats under Special Act 73-79, the number of board members equals the number of towns for the RCEOs and RCOGs. Table II-2 indicates the size of the board for each of the five RPAs, which by statute apportion seats based on individual town populations.

TABLE II-2. Size of Boards of Directors of RPAs in Connecticut.			
<i>Name of RPA</i>	<i>Towns</i>	<i>No. of Board Members</i>	<i>Total Population of Region</i>
Central Conn.	7	17	232,460
Conn. River Estuary	9	18	62,184
Greater Bridgeport	6	18	310,739
Midstate	8	17	109,761
South Western	8	22	362,193
Sources of data: Documents from individual RPAs			

Currently, there are two inter-related issues regarding the composition of RPOs in Connecticut. They concern the qualifications of the people who sit on the boards of directors and whether three different types of regional planning organizations should continue to exist.

⁵ The question of “one person, one vote” has been raised in the past with respect to the single representative per town allowed on the RCEO and RCOG boards. The U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in 1974 (in *Education/Instruccion, Inc. v. Moore*, 503 F.2d 1187) that this provision was not a violation based on the fact that RCOGs do not exercise governmental powers or perform governmental functions. The directors of many of the RCEOs and RCOGs told committee staff that members of their boards of directors generally are in full agreement on most actions taken by the RPO so the absence of proportionate representation has not been an issue.

Board composition. The discussion about board membership is focused on two different types of potential representatives to the boards of directors. A number of people support a requirement that all RPO boards have at least some members who have formal credentials (i.e., education and experience) in the field of planning. This view is based on the belief that such individuals can provide information and insight during discussions about the many land use and other planning responsibilities that are statutorily assigned or voluntarily undertaken by RPOs. Appointees with planning expertise complement and could potentially supplement the work of the RPO staff.

At the same time, other people believe it is vital that the chief elected official of each member town serve on the board of the RPO. The chief elected officials are regarded as being able to discuss development issues from multiple perspectives reflecting the many different interests of the taxpayers in their respective towns, and they are accountable to the public. Perhaps more importantly, the chief elected officials generally also have the authority needed to commit their towns to participate, financially or otherwise, in regional efforts.

The program review committee survey about regional planning sent to municipal chief elected officials asked them about these two types of representatives. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of 86 respondents agreed at least one individual serving on a RPO board should have planning experience, while 55 percent of 89 respondents agreed that chief elected officials should be required to serve on the RPO board in their area.

As previously noted, RPAs have a minimum of two representatives per town, and state statutes currently require one of the town representatives on the board of a RPA to be appointed by the local planning commission. The appointee is not required to be a planner or a member of that commission, but in practice, it appears many are. The legislative body of the town decides how the other RPA representatives will be selected, but there are likewise no work experience or education requirements. In practice, a few towns do have their chief elected official serve on the board, but many appointees are town employees, while others are citizens who are retired or work in the private sector.

Towns that belong to RCEOs and RCOGs, on the other hand, only have a single representative -- the chief elected official. Those individuals may or may not have expertise in the planning field. Some are allowed under the bylaws of the organization to designate an alternate to attend meetings in their place, but in many cases this must be the town manager or another member of the board of selectmen.

A RCEO may co-exist with a RPA within the same state-defined planning region. In such cases, the RPA continues to perform the planning duties outlined in Chapter 127 of the statutes, while the RCEO focuses on broader issues. Currently, two RPAs have formed a joint RCEO that meets monthly. The joint RCEO is not included in the count of 15 RPOs in the state because it basically serves as an information sharing body rather than a decision-making or implementation entity. The three RCEOs counted as part of the 15 RPOs all perform the statutory functions of RPAs because such entities do not operate in their regions. In those cases, the RCEOs generally have access to planning expertise through the RCEO staff. (In addition, one has established a Regional Planning Commission.)

A mechanism available to RCOGs to obtain input from a planner's perspective is a Regional Planning Commission. When RCOGs were originally authorized under state law in 1971, each had to establish a Regional Planning Commission that handled all planning duties and responsibilities on behalf of the council. Towns had the same amount of representation on the planning commission as on the council. The requirement for a Regional Planning Commission was repealed in 2000, and the commissions became optional, advisory bodies. Today, six of the seven RCOGs still have Regional Planning Commissions, although the extent to which the commissions are used varies.

Types of RPOs. With respect to the organizational structure of the RPOs, the legislature has expanded the available choices over the years. When logical planning regions were defined by the state in the 1950s, the only organizational type available was the RPA model, which focused on land use planning functions.

The introduction of the RCEO model in 1965 provided any two or more towns in a region with an option for an organization that would be able to address a broader array of issues and would be governed by the chief elected officials from the member towns. Regions could also have a RPA. Authorization to create RCOGs in 1971 built upon the RCEO model, but to ensure greater participation required that 60 percent of the eligible towns join. In addition, creation of a RCOG within a region resulted in the subsequent dissolution of any existing RPA and/or RCEO and a prohibition on a new RPA and/or RCEO as long as a RCOG exists.

When three types of RPOs first became available, the differences between them were clearer with respect to their responsibilities and the amount of local municipal support needed to establish the particular entity. Over the years, the statutory language describing each entity has been amended multiple times, giving each the same general duties and authority. *Today, there are few differences between a RCEO and a RCOG, while the primary difference between those two types of structures and a RPA is who sits on the board of directors (as discussed above).*

Increasingly people who interact with multiple RPOs have noted the difficulty distinguishing between the three types of organizations. Questions have been raised as to whether one type of structure should be required for all RPOs in Connecticut. This would simplify the existing system by applying a single name and terminology to all of the elements and activities of the RPOs.

The specific model most frequently supported is the RCOG. It is cited for the historically successful work of the largest of the existing RCOGs, the direct involvement of municipal chief elected officials, and the fact that the RCOG model is the one currently used in the largest number of state-defined planning regions in the state. The seven existing RCOGs cover about half of the state's towns (57 percent), population (52 percent), and square mileage (58 percent). Furthermore, the three largest RPOs in the state, in terms of the number of towns belonging to the RPO and the total geographic area, are RCOGs.

In considering changes to the current RPO structure, however, it is worthwhile to examine the history of the state's efforts to promote local government participation through regional organizations. From the time the legislature first adopted formal statutory language regarding Regional Planning Organizations in the 1940s, the state has never mandated that towns

become members of RPOs. Instead, over the decades, as the issues facing local governments increased and the services that town residents wanted came with ever higher price tags, more and more towns chose to participate in RPOs as a mechanism to help address their individual needs.

One RPO was established in the 1940s, and a second in the 1950s. A dozen RPOs were created in the 1960s, and the last of the current 15 RPOs was established in 1972.

In 1965 and 1971, when the state devised the new types of RPOs, it did not require existing RPOs to change. The new models were simply options that offered towns within a given region a approach more directly involving chief elected officials in the process. The fact that nine RPOs changed from the RPA structure to the RCEO or RCOG structure and another RPO was created as a RCEO could be considered an endorsement of those models, but the changes occurred slowly. Four RPOs made the change in the 1970s, three in the 1980s, and one each in the 1990s and 2000. In recent years, however, two other RPAs considered changing to a RCEO or RCOG, but decided not to.

Connecticut citizens are innovators in many ways, but changes in governmental structure and operations tend to occur slowly. Given the ability of all three types of RPOs to perform the same functions, the program review committee believes that forcing a change to a single structural model would be counterproductive. It also could destroy the institutional goodwill that the RPOs have created within their respective areas. Noting that a number of towns studied and rejected the idea of changing their RPO design only a few years ago, the program review committee is concerned that eliminating choices could dampen the willingness of towns to participate in regional activities. Instead of promoting more regionalism, towns might withdraw from formal participation in a RPO.

Recommendations. The program review committee believes the fact that all but one town in the state belongs to a Regional Planning Organization, but groups of neighboring towns have chosen to establish different models, demonstrates the value of offering options. **Therefore, the program review committee recommends:**

All three types of Regional Planning Organizations currently allowed under Connecticut law -- Regional Planning Agencies, Regional Councils of Elected Officials, and Regional Councils of Governments -- should continue to be authorized.

To the extent that state officials believe one particular RPO structural model is preferable to the other models for some or all program purposes, the state can offer more technical or financial support to towns using that particular model. A recent example of this is the new Regional Performance Incentive Program, authorized under Public Act 07-239. The law specifies that proposals submitted by RCOGs that include participation by 50 percent or more of their member towns will be given priority for the funding available.

The committee does believe several modifications to the current statutory requirements for RPOs should be made. The next two recommendations are aimed at clarifying terminology and explicitly confirming powers and duties. A third recommendation seeks to enhance communication with local chief elected officials.

As previously discussed, the three types of RPOs operating in Connecticut share the same major responsibilities, and many people have difficulty keeping track of the specific type of RPO employed in each region. Increasingly, informal references intended to include all three models will use the more generic reference of Regional Planning Organization. Until 2007, this term did not appear in any statutory language. In order to clarify what the term RPO means and to facilitate the use of the term on a more formal basis, the **program review committee recommends:**

Chapter 50, Part IV, of the Connecticut General Statutes shall be amended to add a definition of the term “Regional Planning Organization.” The definition shall specify that the term collectively includes Regional Planning Agencies, Regional Councils of Elected Officials, and Regional Councils of Governments established under the provisions of Chapters 50 and 127 of the statutes.

RCOGs are statutorily authorized to do all of the things that RCEOs and RPAs do, as well as a few other things (such as own property for use as their administrative offices). RCEOs are statutorily authorized to exercise all the powers of a RPA, if there is no RPA in the region, but there is no cross reference to the powers of a RCOG. To clarify that RCEOs have the same authority as Regional Councils of Governments, **the program review committee recommends:**

C.G.S. Sec. 4-124h shall be amended to specify that a legally established Regional Council of Elected Officials can exercise all of the powers of a Regional Council of Governments as defined in Chapter 50 of the statutes.

For the present time, the committee believes access to relevant planning information is available to board members of all three types of RPOs. Although the information is provided to different degrees and in different formats, via the mechanisms described above, in all cases staff of each organization is available to provide expertise in this area.

The absence of direct involvement by municipal chief elected officials in the state-defined planning regions that use the RPA model could be more problematic. The committee believes the person empowered by the citizens of each member town to act on behalf of that town needs to be kept informed and consulted when solutions to complex, long-term, and potentially costly regional issues are being decided. Under the arrangements currently in place in the five existing RPAs, some of the mechanisms for communicating with local chief elected officials are more structured than others. As efforts to increase regional activities expand, with the possibility that RPOs might be given additional responsibilities in the future, it will be even more important to ensure that communication with all local chief elected officials occurs. **The program review committee recommends:**

Regional Planning Agencies shall be required to establish a mechanism for meeting with the chief elected officials of their member towns at least quarterly to communicate information about region-wide issues. The mechanism shall be established by January 1, 2009.

Under the proposed recommendation, Regional Planning Agencies would have flexibility to make use of existing mechanisms that meet the proposed requirement or set up a new structure. In either case, the chief elected officials would have to meet at least four times a year. Examples of acceptable mechanisms include:

- a complementary Regional Council of Elected Officials established by all of the member towns of the Regional Planning Agency for that area alone or in conjunction with another RPA;
- a subcommittee of the board of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) that operates in the region where the RPA is located, if the chief elected officials of all member towns serve on the subcommittee; or
- a new committee or subcommittee of the Regional Planning Agency that is composed of the chief elected officials of all member towns and is charged with receiving information and providing guidance to the board of directors about regional cooperative efforts.

Geographic Boundaries

The existing 15 RPOs vary considerably in terms of their physical characteristics. Table II-3 summarizes the ranges of four characteristics that measure the size of the regions. (See Appendix C for the specific numbers for each RPO.) As indicated, two RPOs are the smallest in two categories each, while one RPO is the largest in three categories.

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Smallest RPO</i>	<i>Largest RPO</i>
Total No. of Towns	4	29	10	Valley	Capitol
Total Population	23,374	739,399	221,481	Northwestern	Capitol
Total Square Miles	58	762	327	Valley	Capitol
Density (people/sq. miles)	271	2,128	661	Northwestern	Greater Bridgeport
Source of data: Connecticut Register and Manual and interviews with RPO executive directors.					

Connecticut is divided up on a regional basis in many different ways. Some of the designations are state-driven, and others are determined by the towns that choose to join a particular activity. State-defined configurations frequently cover all 169 towns, and the total number of regions tends to be smaller than the number established through local initiatives. Conversely, when local towns voluntarily create regional programs, the number of participants often evolves over time, starting with a few towns, and then expanding to larger numbers if the initial effort is successful.

While state agencies and the legislature have made efforts in recent years to align regions for related programs, the results have been mixed. In 1993, in response to Special Act 92-22, OPM identified boundaries for six uniform regional service delivery areas to be used by the state's four health and human services agencies. In 2005, one task of the new Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) was development of regional boundaries for planning and operational purposes. DEMHS sought to match its lines with those

of regions that were already established such as the RPOs. In the end, however, several towns were grouped with different towns, based on police and fire mutual aid agreements.

The 2002 ACIR report on regional activities included data about the number of voluntary inter-municipal cooperative programs that each town in the state participated in at that time. The report indicated the smallest number of general town and education programs combined was 33, and the largest number was 94. The number of non-education programs alone per town ranged from 26 to 71.⁶ (See Appendix D for a map summarizing the data that were in the ACIR report.)

The complexity and extent to which individual towns have to deal with multiple regions is illustrated by the experience of one RPO. The Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency has identified at least 20 different purposes for which its member towns are assigned to specific “regions,” “committees,” or “areas.” In four cases, the boundaries are the same seven towns that comprise the RPO. In other cases, the seven towns are grouped with other towns to form a larger region. In at least eight cases, the seven RPO towns are split among multiple regions. This means the chief elected officials must interact with different groups of colleagues for those purposes, and RPO staff must attend multiple meetings on the same topic, if they want to represent the interests of their region on that topic.

Determining the exact number of geographic regions to establish for a particular program or to accomplish a specific function is not easy. The ultimate goal of the effort is the creation of an area that can support but not overwhelm the organization that will carry out the desired purpose within the specified regions. In order for that entity to be viable, members of the board must feel that their input receives equal consideration, and the entity also must have sufficient resources.

In the 1950s, the Connecticut Development Commission examined a number of factors before it defined the boundaries that eventually became the current 15 RPOs. The process used by CDC was summarized in the September briefing. Major characteristics that CDC looked at included:

- newspaper circulation patterns;
- commuting patterns of manufacturing workers;
- telephone service zones;
- traffic flow patterns; and
- growth trends in urban centers and their surrounding areas.

Since the original designation of logical planning regions, changes in the economy of Connecticut, housing patterns, environmental concerns, and technology in general have occurred and are continuing to occur. This means factors such as newspaper circulation and telephone service are less helpful, while the commuting patterns of a wider range of workers and the location of viable urban centers are more important. Environmental elements such as wetlands, sewer capacity, and aquifer protection are also relevant. Another factor that should be considered is local perceptions of social and historic ties.

⁶ ACIR, *Ibid.*, pp A-1 – A-3.

Under C.G.S. Sec. 16a-4a, the Office of Policy and Management has the authority to designate or redesignate logical planning regions within the state. Municipal chief elected officials who responded to the program review committee survey overwhelmingly supported periodic re-examination of the planning regions. Ninety-three percent of 89 respondents agreed the boundaries of the existing areas, originally developed in the 1950s and 1960s, should be re-evaluated periodically.

Given these factors, the program review committee believes OPM should be required to reexamine the boundaries of the state's planning regions periodically. Specifically, **the program review committee recommends:**

At least every 20 years, the Office of Policy and Management shall conduct an analysis of the boundaries of the state-defined logical planning areas in Connecticut and adopt new boundaries, if appropriate, based on that analysis. As part of its review, OPM shall develop criteria that will examine the influence of urban centers on neighboring towns in the context of current trends related to economic development and the environment, including characteristics such as housing patterns, employment levels, commuting patterns for the most widely held job classifications in the state, traffic patterns on major roadways, local perceptions of social and historic ties, and environmental considerations. OPM shall also include a measure that takes into consideration the size of the proposed regions (e.g., the number of towns, total population, and/or total square mileage), with the goal of establishing a minimum size for logical planning areas.

The first analysis of the regions under this new system should be completed by October 1, 2009, with any revision of boundaries taking effect by July 1, 2010.

The program review committee believes the analysis by OPM should build on the structures and relationships already in place among the existing RPOs, taking into consideration how the needs and interests of the citizens of Connecticut may have changed since the existing regions were originally defined. As with the current RPO system, towns would continue to have the option of joining the planning organization operating within their designated area, although failing to maintain membership in a reconfigured RPO would mean a town would lose access to the benefits of belonging to a RPO. Based on the increased level of support towns have been showing for regional projects, the committee is optimistic that towns will continue to participate in RPOs, even if the existing boundaries are revised.

The proposal of a review every 20 years is intended to ensure a periodic re-examination of regional activities and economic development trends within the state, while providing a degree of stability to the ongoing operation of RPOs. Much of the planning work of the RPOs involves multi-year time periods, and the RPOs need consistent boundaries to make long-range projections and measure results. A 20-year review period should meet both of the intended purposes.

The portion of the recommendation concerning the identification of a minimum size for a logical planning region is intended to reflect the results of other planning-related efforts in recent years that produced state-based maps with smaller numbers of regions. A specific number is not proposed in order to allow the results of the recommended analysis to guide the outcome.

Resources

The workload of each Regional Planning Organization is driven by three factors:

- state mandates set out in statute;
- federal government requirements related to grants, especially transportation grants; and
- individual agenda items chosen by member towns.

The primary statutory responsibilities of all three types of RPOs are the same. The key recurring duty involves review and comment tasks in response to actions undertaken by local towns or developers related to zoning and subdivision changes. In operation, the extent of this responsibility varies considerably among RPOs, depending on the size and characteristics of the region, and it is driven by activity at the municipal level. Another key statutory requirement -- preparation of a Regional Development Plan -- is mandated only once every 10 years.

Federal transportation money is an important source of revenue for the 11 RPOs that have been designated Metropolitan Planning Organizations. Consequently, *some of the most commonly performed tasks carried out by RPO staff are the ones needed to meet the ongoing requirements of such federal grants.* Major activities include development of a Transportation Improvement Program, a list of federally funded transportation projects to maintain and enhance the roadway network in the region, and preparation of a Regional Transportation Plan, a 25-year overview of proposed major transportation investments in the region that must be updated every three years.

All RPOs also handle a wide variety of other activities determined by the needs of the member towns within their regions. The scope and diversity of such activities depend on the staff and financial resources available to each RPO. Specific duties range from staffing regional environmental entities to administering assistance

Figure II-2. Examples of Activities Performed by RPOs

- develop regional emergency deployment plans
- organize regional recycling programs
- develop regional maps/guides for hiking trails and in-water routes
- coordinate regional public health mutual aid agreements
- provide administrative support to environmental organizations
- prepare environmental impact evaluations
- develop comprehensive economic development strategies
- provide administrative support for regional fuel banks
- help establish regional dog pounds
- operate regional Brownfields Partnerships

programs to operating transit programs and animal shelters. Figure II-2 summarizes some of the types of activities that RPOs perform, which were presented in more detail in the September briefing. A new activity being undertaken by several RPOs on behalf of their own member

towns and towns in neighboring RPOs involves the administration of federal Homeland Security funding.

The number of staff per RPO ranges from 1.5 to 20, not counting outside consultants hired for specific projects. Table II-4 shows the number of staff employed by each Regional Planning Organization in June 2007.

TABLE II-4. Staff Employed by Individual RPOs, June 2007.			
<i>Name of RPO</i>	<i>Professional</i>	<i>Administrative</i>	<i>Total</i>
Capitol Region Council of Governments	15	5	20
Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency	7	2	9
Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency	7	2	9
Council of Governments of the Central Naugatuck Valley	6	2	8
Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency	7	2	9
Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials	3	2 part-time	4 FTE
Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials	1	1 part time	1.5
Midstate Regional Planning Agency	2	2	4
Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments	3	1	4*
Northwestern Connecticut Council of Governments	1	1	2
South Central Regional Council of Governments	6	1	7
Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments	8	1	9
South Western Regional Planning Agency	8	1	9
Valley Council of Governments	3	2	5
Windham Region Council of Governments	2.5	1	3.5
*also employs 1 animal control officer, 3 part-time assistant animal control officers, and 11 transit drivers. Sources of data: documents from and interviews with RPO executive directors [revised September 2007]			

In some regions, the demands of the transportation-related work, the grants for which cover the cost of a large portion of the staff, leave little time for other tasks. Indeed, in some cases, it can be difficult for RPOs to complete general planning tasks such as in-depth review and comment on proposed subdivisions and/or zone use changes in a timely manner.

The state first began funding Regional Planning Agencies in 1959, but it was not until 1978 that all three types of RPOs became eligible for general planning funds from OPM. Currently, the amount of State Grant In Aid (SGIA) funding is determined annually by a formula specified in C.G.S. Sec. 4-124q. Each RPO receives the same base amount of money, which is 5.3 percent of the total appropriation for the SGIA program, for a total of 79.5 percent. Then, RPOs that raise more than the base amount in local dues receive an additional amount that is calculated by dividing the amount they raised in excess of the base by the total amount of excess money raised by all of the RPOs.⁷

SGIA funds are supposed to provide RPOs with financial assistance toward the cost of their statutory planning functions. However, in interviews with program review staff, several

⁷ During FY 07, RPOs raised between \$50,000 and \$437,000 each from member dues. The average per capita rate that member towns in each RPO were assessed ranged from 26 cents to \$2.40.

RPO executive directors stated that the money is insufficient to cover the cost of preparing a regional plan of development or even allowing for detailed comments on the statutorily required referrals of certain zoning and subdivision changes submitted by municipalities in the region.

In state FY 07, SGIA funding totaled \$640,000. The minimum base grant was \$33,920. Table II-5 lists the total amount of SGIA funding that each RPO received that year. For FY 08, funding totals \$1 million, the first increase in seven years.

Historic data on the amount of SGIA funding for the past 20 years was included in the September briefing report. Of particular concern was the fact that adjusted for inflation, between 1995 and 2007 the purchasing power of SGIA funding for the RPOs declined by one-quarter.

RPOs can also receive purpose-specific state funding, but the amount and frequency are more variable. One of the most common uses of these funds is for activities related to the environment (e.g., recycling, hazardous waste, etc.).

RPOs increasingly provide a key link between the state and individual towns. However, the ability of individual RPOs to perform additional tasks is dependent on the number of staff available to carry out required functions. The fact that some RPOs currently must seek out additional activities (with attendant funding) in order to have sufficient revenue to keep their existing workers employed full-time raises concerns about their ability to take on additional duties, if the state were to mandate specific tasks. Given the limited resources of some RPOs and the ever-widening range of tasks that member towns would like them to perform, there is a concern that they will have less time for regionally oriented efforts.

<i>RPO</i>	<i>Grant</i>
CRCOG	\$78,095
CCRPA	\$40,036
CRERPA	\$43,427
COGCNV	\$43,132
GBRPA	\$39,154
HVCEO	\$45,971
LHCEO	\$34,867
MRPA	\$38,213
NECCOG	\$38,692
NWCCOG	\$36,379
SCRCOG	\$46,482
SCCOG	\$42,713
SWRPA	\$41,910
VCOG	\$35,307
WINCOG	\$35,622
Source of data: OPM	

Role of the Office of Policy and Management

The Office of Policy and Management, among its many duties, is responsible for the preparation of the State Plan of Conservation and Development and providing support to the Regional Planning Organizations. Its responsibilities related to both of these functions have grown over the years. Significant responsibilities were added in 2006 and 2007, when state government leaders put forth several key policy initiatives to coordinate responsible growth policies across state agencies and among the state, the Regional Planning Organizations, and local government.

One of the initiatives establishes an Interagency Steering Council (consisting of the commissioners of the Departments of Economic and Community Development, Environmental Protection, Agriculture, Transportation, and Public Health, as well as the executive directors of the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority and the Connecticut Development Authority). The other creates a 19-member Responsible Growth Task Force, which includes all Interagency Steering Council members as well as members of the public. Both are chaired by OPM, are

inter-related, and are charged with identifying responsible growth criteria to help guide state investment decisions related to land use. The task force must report to the governor with recommendations no later than February 15, 2008.

State conservation and development planning. The State Plan of Conservation and Development is statutorily required under Chapter 297 (C.G.S. Sections 16a-24 through 16a-33). The plan serves as a statement of the development, resource management, and public investment policies of the state. The most recent State C&D Plan, effective from 2005 to 2010, was adopted by the legislature and signed into law under Public Act 05-205. As discussed in the September briefing, it contains two components – the plan text and the Locational Guide Map, which is a physical representation of the conservation and development policies encouraged by the state. The map contains four development and four conservation policies, which are assigned a relative priority value.

The 2005 state C&D plan departed from the format of previous plans by introducing six Growth Management Principles and associated policy recommendations in order to better integrate state planning functions across state agencies. Table II-6 lists the six principles, the number of policies contained in the plan text assigned for each growth management principle, and the number of recommendations to implement the policies within each principle. Altogether there are 46 policies and 353 recommendations in the plan text.

Table II-6. State Plan of Conservation and Development, 2005 - 2010.		
Growth Management Principle	Number of Policies	Number of Recommendations to Implement Policies
1. Redevelop and Revitalize Regional Centers and Areas with Existing or Currently Planned Physical Infrastructure	8	79
2) Expand Housing Opportunities and Design Choices to Accommodate a Variety of Household Types and Needs	1	21
3) Concentrate Development Around Transportation Nodes and Along Major Transportation Corridors to Support the Viability of Transportation Options	4	54
4) Conserve and Restore the Natural Environment, Cultural and Historical Resources, and Traditional Rural Lands	17	100
5) Protect and Ensure the Integrity of Environmental Assets Critical to Public Health and Safety	16	90
6) Promote Integrated Planning Across all Levels of Government to Address Issues on a Statewide, Regional and Local Basis	0	9
Total	46	353
Source: Conservation and Development Policies Plan for Connecticut: 2005 - 2010.		

The committee believes the shift to integrate conservation and development planning by using the six growth management principles is beneficial because it acknowledges that land use planning affects other policy areas. However, the policy goals contained in the plan text should be prioritized, and estimates regarding funding levels needed to implement a particular policy should be provided. This will help the Interagency Steering Council focus its efforts and make the plan more useful as a blueprint on ways to target state dollars.

The program review committee recommends:

In preparing the 2010 revision of the State Plan of Conservation and Development, the Office of Policy and Management shall:

- **for each policy contained in the plan:**
 - **assign a priority to it;**
 - **provide an estimate of the level of funding needed to implement it and identify the potential source(s) of funding;**
 - **set time-frame(s) for implementation; and**
 - **identify the entity or entities responsible for implementation**
- **for each of the six growth management principles, include a minimum of three benchmarks, one of which shall be financial, to measure progress towards implementation of the plan.**

The committee believes prioritizing the policies and accompanying recommendations provides the necessary link between planning and funding decisions. Furthermore, it is important to know the extent to which progress has been made in implementing the policies in the plan. As noted in Section I, given that 81 percent of chief elected officials responding to the committee's survey disagreed that the State C&D Plan was used to guide development in their town, relating the goals in the plan to state funding will make it a more dynamic document.

OPM review of regional plans of development. *Although regional plans of development are purely advisory, the plans should be viewed as key documents that link together towns with common interests, while supporting the overall goals of the State C&D Plan.* Since 2005, RPOs must submit proposed Regional Plans of Development to the secretary of OPM for findings, in the form of comments and recommendations, before the RPO holds a public hearing on the regional plan and adopts it. The findings by OPM must include a review of the plan to determine if the proposed plan is “not inconsistent” with the State C&D Plan and the State Economic Strategic Plan (which is not due until July 2009). After an RPO adopts a regional plan, if there are still any inconsistencies with the State Plan of Conservation and Development, the RPO must notify OPM of those inconsistencies and the reasons for them.

Until recently, although the law required each RPO to adopt a plan of development, it set no time frame for doing so. In 2005 the legislature began requiring plans of development to be updated at least once every 10 years, and an initial revision had to begin no more than three years

after July 1, 2005 (i.e., by July 1, 2008). As of November 19, 2007, more than half of the RPOs had submitted updated plans, and OPM has found none to be inconsistent with the state plan.

At the present time:

- *there is no standard format for RPOs to follow when developing their Regional Plans of Development;*
- *there are no formal criteria for review of a regional plan by OPM to determine if it is inconsistent with the state plan; and*
- *there is no requirement for an implementation section, so OPM cannot measure progress made toward meeting regional goals.*

To facilitate the development of future regional plans, the committee believes there should be clearer guidance regarding how those plans will be evaluated. Therefore, **the program review committee recommends:**

The Office of Policy and Management shall develop criteria for the uniform review of Regional Plans of Development submitted to it in order to determine whether they are consistent with the State Plan of Conservation and Development.

The program review committee is also recommending a technical change to the name of the regional plan. State statutes refer to the State Conservation and Development Plan and Municipal Conservation and Development Plans, but at the regional level, the plan is called the Regional Plan of Development. For consistency, **the program review committee recommends:**

The name of the Regional Plan of Development shall be changed to the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development.

Targeting state investments. *Targeting state dollars, through infrastructure investments and open space policies, is an important mechanism that the state can use to control growth at the local level. Since 1983, certain state infrastructure investments that exceed \$100,000 (raised to \$200,000 in 2007)⁸ are required to be consistent with the State C&D Plan. State law requires state agency actions *be consistent* with the plan for certain federal- or state-funded developments including:*

- acquisition of real property;
- development or improvement of real property;
- acquisition of public transportation equipment or facilities;
- acquisition, development, or improvement of public transportation equipment or facilities; and
- the third phase of UConn 2000.

⁸ Public Act 07-239 increased the thresholds from \$100,000 to \$200,000 effective July 1, 2007.

In each of these cases, state law requires a state agency to request, and OPM to provide, an advisory statement commenting on whether the agency's actions conform to the plan. The secretary of OPM must submit that advisory statement to the State Bond Commission when an item is placed on the agenda, and the commission must consider the statement prior to allocating any bond funds. In practice, items are rarely placed on the agenda if the advisory statement is negative. Beyond this, the state plan is largely an advisory document, with state law requiring certain state agency plans only *consider* the State C&D Plan.

In Connecticut, land use decisions are made at the local level. Recently, legislative and executive branch strategies have begun to focus on linking state investment decisions with implementation of responsible growth principles at the local level. Specific strategies include:

- establishing an Interagency Steering Council (described above) under Executive Order No. 15 and charging it with coordinating policy development and capital planning;
- establishing a 19-member Responsible Growth Task Force (also noted above) under P.A. 07-239, which includes all Interagency Steering Council members, and is charged with identifying responsible growth criteria to help guide the state's future investment decisions;
- making municipalities ineligible for discretionary state funding if a municipality has not updated its conservation and development plan within a 10-year period, unless specifically waived by the OPM secretary;
- requiring the state Economic Strategic Plan that is to be developed on or before July 1, 2009, to be consistent with the text and locational guide map of the State C&D Plan; and
- requiring the OPM secretary to develop and submit recommendations for setting and revising boundaries for priority funding areas in order to target state investment to specific areas in conjunction with the 2010 – 2015 State Plan of Conservation and Development, both of which are subject to legislative approval. Once the boundaries are effective, each state agency will be required to review its regulations and modify them to carry out coordinated management of growth-related projects in priority funding areas.

State bonding. Public Act 07-7 (June Special Session) created a new Responsible Growth Incentive Fund with \$15 million in bond funds -- \$5 million in FY 08 and \$10 million in FY 09 – authorized for disbursement. For FY 09, half of the money is to be used for grants of \$250,000 to \$1 million each to implement transit-oriented plans in designated pilot program areas. In order to be eligible for a grant, participating municipalities must have completed a memorandum of understanding involving one or more Regional Planning Organizations.

The act also provides bond funds for RPOs to use for geospatial information systems (GIS) data collection and mapping (up to \$400,000), and water pollution control projects (up to \$1,000,000). An additional \$500,000 in bond funds was targeted to municipalities to prepare and revise their Municipal Plans of Conservation and Development.

Regional Review of Projects

Several statutes concerning local entities with land use responsibilities also contain mandates involving Regional Planning Organizations. Two key provisions require written notification to the RPO in the state-defined region where a town is located whenever:

- a municipal zoning commission is considering a proposal to establish or change a zone or a regulation affecting the use of a zone within 500 feet of the boundary of another municipality within the RPO area (C.G.S. Sec. 8-3b); and
- a municipal planning commission is considering a plan for a subdivision of land and the area abuts or includes land in two or more municipalities (C.G.S. Sec. 8-26b).

In the first case, the RPO is required to study the proposal and report its findings and recommendations to the municipal zoning commission. Reports by the RPO can address potential negative inter-municipal and environmental impacts created by the proposal. Inter-municipal concerns may include issues such as traffic, density, environmental impact, and the burden placed on the adjacent community. Regional concerns may include those objectives and goals supported in the Regional Plan of Development. The report is advisory, but it must be made part of the local public hearing record for the proposed change. In the second case, the RPO must submit its findings on the inter-municipal aspects of the proposed subdivision including street layout, storm drainage, and sewer and water service.

In both instances, failure to submit a report at or before the town's public hearing on the matter results in a presumption that the RPO does not disapprove of the proposal. Committee staff requested data on the number of such reviews conducted by RPOs in a three-year period. Based on their responses, RPOs typically review a large number of zone use changes and to a lesser extent, changes involving subdivisions. However, most of these reviews are provided as a courtesy to member municipalities and are not required under state law.

State statutes also require that RPOs be notified, and in some cases comment on, various other projects occurring within a region. These include certain economic development programs, hazardous waste facilities and burial of radioactive waste, solid waste management plans, water supply and water flow issues, and public utility projects.

Although legislation has been raised since 1979 that would allow RPOs to either comment on projects of regional significance or actually approve them, in neither case has such authority been granted. As recently as last session, SB 1215 defined projects of regional significance as those meeting the threshold established for review by the State Traffic Commission.⁹ The bill also proposed giving RCOGs the authority to establish a process for the review of projects of regional significance and required their approval in order for such a project to move forward.

⁹ State Traffic Commission regulations require a certificate of operation for all developments of 100,000 square feet of floor area and/or 200 or more parking spaces which abut or adjoin a state highway or substantially affect state highway traffic.

One question on the PRI committee survey listed a number of functions that could be performed by RPOs and asked municipal chief elected officials whether they agreed or disagreed that RPOs should perform those functions. A high percentage of the chief elected officials who responded agreed that RPOs should comment on proposed subdivisions that abut or include land in two or more towns (91 percent of 92 respondents) as well as review and comment on proposed zone use or zone use changes within 500 feet of another town boundary (89 percent) – the two areas where RPOs *already have* authority. A slightly higher proportion (92 percent of 91 chief elected officials) agreed that RPOs should review and comment on local zoning projects with regional significance.

In order to make regional planning relevant, the committee believes that RPOs should at least be allowed to comment on projects that would have a regional impact. It would provide a broader perspective on development that occurs in one town, but has an impact beyond that town's border, and such comments should discuss such projects in the context of the goals contained in the Regional Development Plan. **Therefore, the program review committee recommends:**

Regional Planning Organizations shall be given the statutory authority to comment on “projects of regional significance” that will be located in one town but will impact other towns in the region, or that are located in a town in another region but the town is contiguous to the region. The criteria for comment shall include analysis of the project's compliance with the Regional Development Plan as well as other issues the Regional Planning Organizations believe are critical to the analysis. Notice shall be provided to a Regional Planning Organization not later than 30 days before the public hearing to be held by the town where the project will be located. The RPO shall study any such proposal and shall report its findings and recommendations to the zoning commission at or before the hearing. The report of the RPO shall be advisory, but it shall be made a part of the record of such hearing. If the RPO does not submit a report at or before the hearing, it shall be presumed that it does not disapprove of the project.

The Office of Policy and Management, in consultation with the Interagency Steering Council established by Executive Order No. 15, shall develop regulations that define the term “projects of regional significance” and the criteria that would initiate a review of such projects by a Regional Planning Organization. The criteria used to define “projects of regional significance” shall address, but not be limited to, such factors as project location, type, (such as energy, transportation, major infrastructure, water, or open space), and scope (size).

Funding To Support Regional Initiatives

Regional planning organizations have no revenue-raising authority. They are dependent on federal, state, and local governments for funding. As noted in the September briefing, RPOs

receive dues from member towns, but for many of them, most of the funding they receive comes from federal transportation dollars. The state increased total SGIA funding from \$640,000 to \$1 million in FY 08, the first increase in seven years, to be shared among the 15 RPOs according to a statutory formula.

Since 2000, state law has allowed chief elected officials in two or more municipalities to share real and personal property tax revenue, subject to approval by their legislative bodies (C.G.S. Sec. 7-148bb). The agreement must be negotiated, with an opportunity for public participation; and adopted by resolution of each participating municipality's legislative body. It must contain all of the provisions on which the municipalities agree. These provisions can include: (1) which tax revenue will be shared, and (2) how it will be collected. The agreement must contain procedures for its amendment and termination and a municipality's withdrawal from it. To date no municipalities in Connecticut have entered into such agreements.

It seems highly unlikely that two or more municipalities will share property tax revenue without it being mandated by the state. In the past, legislation was proposed to give RPOs a separate revenue stream including bonding authority, a portion of the state sales tax collected in the region, or a portion of the property tax collected by towns in their regions. To date, however, no such legislation has been adopted.

Under Public Act 07-239, OPM must conduct two studies and submit recommendations to the planning and development and the finance, revenue, and bonding committees by July 1, 2009. The first concerns regional tax-based revenue sharing programs; the other examines regional asset districts operating in other states. Future discussions of these topics will be a valuable addition to the debate on how these types of programs could be structured to provide property tax relief.

One example of a successful revenue-sharing model operating in another area of the country is in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region where seven-counties share property tax revenue as a way to reduce the fiscal disparity between large cities and the surrounding suburbs. Since 1971, municipalities within the Twin Cities region have been contributing 40 percent of the growth in their commercial and industrial tax base to an areawide pool. This pool is then apportioned to each municipality based on its population and relative fiscal capacity.

In terms of a model for regional asset districts, the state of Pennsylvania allows Allegheny County to levy a 1 percent sales tax to support regional recreational and cultural attractions. The county must split the tax between itself and the regional asset district charged with supporting these attractions. It must use its share to reduce county property taxes. Another way that states have tried to ease the pressure on local property taxes bases is to allow municipalities to levy sales and income taxes, a move that shifts some of the tax burden to nonresidents who work or shop in the municipality.

Regional performance incentive program. There is general agreement that sharing services on a voluntary basis often is more efficient, and that efforts to expand the number and variety of cooperative services should be encouraged. Public Act 07-239 established a Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP) to be administered by OPM. A one-time appropriation of \$8.6 million was allocated for FY 08. It allows any RPO to submit a proposal for joint

provision of a service or services that are currently provided by municipalities within the region of the RPO (or contiguous to the region), but not currently provided on a regional basis. The proposals submitted by RPOs must include a service or services that may increase the purchasing power of municipalities or provide a cost savings initiative that results in a decrease in the expenses of participating municipalities and lower property taxes.

The secretary of OPM is charged with reviewing all proposals and awarding grants to those determined to best meet the requirements. Furthermore, the act requires the secretary to give priority to proposals presented by RCOGs that have at least half of their member towns participating in the proposal. The OPM secretary must report to the governor and the Committee on Finance, Revenue and Bonding by February 1, 2008, on how the grants were allocated. All proposals had to be submitted to OPM by December 3, 2007.

As noted in the September briefing, the act is very specific in terms of the information that must be included in the proposal submission. Each proposal must:

- describe at least one service currently provided by a municipality or municipalities within the Regional Planning Organization (or contiguous to the RPO) but not currently provided on a regional basis;
- provide a description of how such service would be delivered on a regional basis, including consideration of what entity would be responsible for such service, and how the population would continue to be served;
- describe the amount and the manner in which the service will achieve economies of scale and the amount and manner in which each municipality will reduce its mill rate as a result of the savings realized by changing the municipal service to a regional service;
- include a cost-benefit analysis for the provision of such service by the municipality and by the RPO;
- set out a plan of implementation for such regional service; and
- estimate the savings that will be realized by each municipality.

Proposals must also include a resolution endorsing the proposal from the legislative body of each municipality participating in the project. In addition, each municipality must certify that there are no legal obstacles to providing services in the manner proposed, including but not limited to binding arbitration agreements. These two requirements have been identified by multiple people at the state, regional, and local level as obstacles in the current language establishing the program.

The deadline for submission of proposals was December 3, 2007. The Office of Policy and Management provided committee staff with some aggregate data on the proposals it received. According to OPM:

- 11 of the 15 RPOs submitted proposals;
- 32 proposals were submitted amounting to \$11.5 million; and
- 129 towns are participating in one or more of the proposals.

The categories included proposals for regional efforts in public safety, economic development, information technology, animal control, and land use.

Although this initial program is a one-time event, the program review committee believes the idea behind it is a good one, and the program should continue, but with some modifications. Specifically, **the program review committee recommends:**

The Regional Performance Incentive Program shall:

- **be established as an ongoing program;**
- **include criteria to be developed by OPM for evaluating proposals;**
and
- **give a preference to proposals that encompass region-wide efforts.**

Based on the review of applications submitted in December 2007, the Office of Policy and Management should develop proposed substitute language for operation of the program in the future if necessary to overcome barriers identified as preventing projects of a regional nature from being established.

Towns that act regionally should be rewarded to encourage more regionalism. Because the program is new and one-time, OPM has not yet developed criteria to rank the proposals received. OPM could establish a point system to reward RPOs that submit proposals that provide for revenue sharing or other high priority project areas. Regions with the most points would get the most incentive revenues.

An Office of Legislative Research report examined other states that provide grants to two or more towns that share or consolidate municipal services.¹⁰ The report looked at states in the Northeast and found at least four of those states -- Maine, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania -- provide grants to municipal and county governments to share services. The amounts allocated for the programs in FY 07 ranged from \$500,000 in Maine to more than \$25 million in New York. Some of the states target funds to encourage specific activities or services be shared, while others allow the use of funds for a broad array of purposes. In addition, in two of the four states, a local match of funds is required ranging from 10 percent in New Jersey to 50 percent in Maine. Appendix E contains a table comparing the four programs.

¹⁰ Office of Legislative Research, 2007-R-0047, *Grants for Consolidating Municipal Services*, January 16, 2007.

APPENDIX B

Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee Survey of Chief Elected Officials

1. Why is your town a member of a Regional Planning Organization (i.e., the Regional Council of Governments, Regional Council of Elected Officials, or Regional Planning Agency that operates in your area of the state)? (Please check all that apply.)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Address issues that cross town boundaries	97.0%	96
Facilitate the sharing of services among towns	74.8%	74
Improve the way land use decisions are made	60.6%	60
Enable town to purchase an item with other towns that it could not afford to buy by itself	45.5%	45
Address concerns about environmental issues	57.6%	57
Make group purchases at a reduced price for specific items	43.4%	43
Other (please specify)	27.3%	27
<i>answered question</i>		98
<i>skipped question</i>		2

2. With respect to Regional Planning Organizations in Connecticut (i.e., the Regional Councils of Governments, Regional Councils of Elected Officials, and Regional Planning Agencies established in the 15 state-defined planning areas of the state), please indicate whether you agree or disagree that the functions of Regional Planning Organizations should be to:

	Agree	Disagree	Rating Average	Response Count
Create and adopt regional plans of development	80.6% (88)	9.5% (9)	1.09	95
Assist with preparation of municipal plans of conservation and development	88.4% (84)	11.6% (11)	1.12	95
Assist in the development of zoning regulations for individual towns	74.4% (87)	25.6% (23)	1.26	90
Review and comment on proposed zone use or zone use changes within 500 feet of another town boundary	88.1% (82)	10.9% (10)	1.11	92
Review and comment on proposed subdivisions that abut or include land in two or more towns	81.3% (84)	8.7% (8)	1.09	92
Review and comment on LOCAL zoning projects with regional significance	82.3% (84)	7.7% (7)	1.08	91
Review and comment on STATE development projects that affect their regions	100.0% (85)	0.0% (0)	1.00	95
Create economic development strategies for their regions	81.4% (85)	8.6% (8)	1.09	93
Carry out transportation planning activities	88.0% (85)	1.0% (1)	1.01	96
Discuss affordable housing issues	82.2% (74)	17.8% (16)	1.18	90
Coordinate emergency management and homeland security efforts	86.8% (78)	14.1% (13)	1.14	92
Perform any tasks that member towns collectively choose	84.8% (87)	5.4% (5)	1.05	92
			<i>answered question</i>	88
			<i>skipped question</i>	3

3. With respect to conservation and development planning activities in Connecticut, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.

	Agree	Disagree	Rating Average	Response Count
The STATE plan of conservation and development is used extensively to guide development in my town.	18.7% (17)	81.3% (74)	1.81	91
The REGIONAL plan of development for my area reflects the development issues in my town.	68.4% (47)	46.6% (41)	1.47	88
My TOWN'S plan of conservation and development is effective in guiding development within my town.	84.2% (80)	15.8% (15)	1.16	95
Development projects within a town should be required to comply with the STATE plan of conservation and development.	34.1% (29)	65.9% (68)	1.66	85
<i>answered question</i>				87
<i>skipped question</i>				4

4. With respect to Regional Planning Organizations in Connecticut (i.e., the Regional Councils of Governments, Regional Councils of Elected Officials, and Regional Planning Agencies established in the 15 state-defined planning areas of the state), please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.

	Agree	Disagree	Rating Average	Response Count
Eligibility for membership in a Regional Planning Organization should be limited to the towns located within the state-defined boundaries for that planning region.	87.8% (68)	32.2% (28)	1.32	87
Chief elected officials should be required to serve on the board of the Regional Planning Organization in their area.	66.1% (48)	44.9% (40)	1.45	89
At least one individual serving on the board of a Regional Planning Organization should have planning experience.	84.0% (65)	36.0% (31)	1.36	86
As allowed under state law, the boundaries of the existing regional planning areas, which were developed in the 1950s and 1960s, should be reevaluated periodically.	89.3% (83)	6.7% (6)	1.07	89
<i>answered question</i>				80
<i>skipped question</i>				11

6. Overall how would you describe the efforts of the Regional Planning Organization in your region (i.e., the Regional Council of Governments, Regional Council of Elected Officials, or Regional Planning Agency that operates in your area of the state) to meet the needs of your town?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Excellent 	39.6%	36
Good 	41.8%	38
Fair 	13.2%	12
Poor 	5.5%	5
	<i>answered question</i>	81
	<i>skipped question</i>	10

8. What, if any, additional functions would you like the Regional Planning Organization in your region (i.e., the Regional Council of Governments, Regional Council of Elected Officials, or Regional Planning Agency that operates in your area of the state) to perform?

	Response Count
	51
	<i>answered question</i>
	61
	<i>skipped question</i>
	60

7. Do you think the state of Connecticut should provide incentives to Regional Planning Organizations (i.e., the Regional Councils of Governments, Regional Councils of Elected Officials, and Regional Planning Agencies established in the 16 state-defined planning areas of the state) to encourage more regional cooperation?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes 	87.0%	80
No 	13.0%	12
	<i>answered question</i>	82
	<i>skipped question</i>	8

8. What incentives could the state of Connecticut offer that would encourage your town to participate in more regional activities offered through Regional Planning Organizations (i.e., the Regional Councils of Governments, Regional Councils of Elected Officials, and Regional Planning Agencies established in the 16 state-defined planning areas of the state)?

	Response Count
	66
<i>answered question</i>	88
<i>skipped question</i>	36

9. Which of the following purchasing opportunities does your town currently make use of? (Please check all that apply.)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Purchase agreements and contracts negotiated by the state of Connecticut	92.1%	81
Cooperative purchasing opportunities offered by your own Regional Planning Organization (i.e., the Regional Council of Governments, Regional Council of Elected Officials, or Regional Planning Agency that operates in your area of the state)	50.0%	44
Cooperative purchasing programs operated by other Regional Planning Organizations	25.1%	23
Purchasing opportunities offered by organizations such as the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities or the Capitol Region Education Council	60.2%	53
Direct agreements with one or more towns	36.4%	32
Other (please specify)	10.2%	9
<i>answered question</i>		88
<i>skipped question</i>		18

10. In the future, would your town be interested in participating in any of the purchasing or service delivery opportunities listed below, if they were offered through a Regional Planning Organization (i.e., one of the Regional Councils of Governments, Regional Councils of Elected Officials, or Regional Planning Agencies established in the 16 state-defined planning areas of the state)? (Please check all that apply.)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Buying equipment to be used by multiple towns		83.0%	73
Sharing personnel that would perform the same function for multiple towns		78.4%	69
Developing model contract language that could be adopted separately by multiple towns		73.9%	65
Sharing the use and expenses of recreational facilities located in another town		60.2%	53
Participating in cooperative purchasing programs		82.1%	81
Other (please specify)		6.8%	6
	<i>answered question</i>		88
	<i>skipped question</i>		13

APPENDIX C. Demographic Characteristics of Connecticut Regional Planning Organizations.

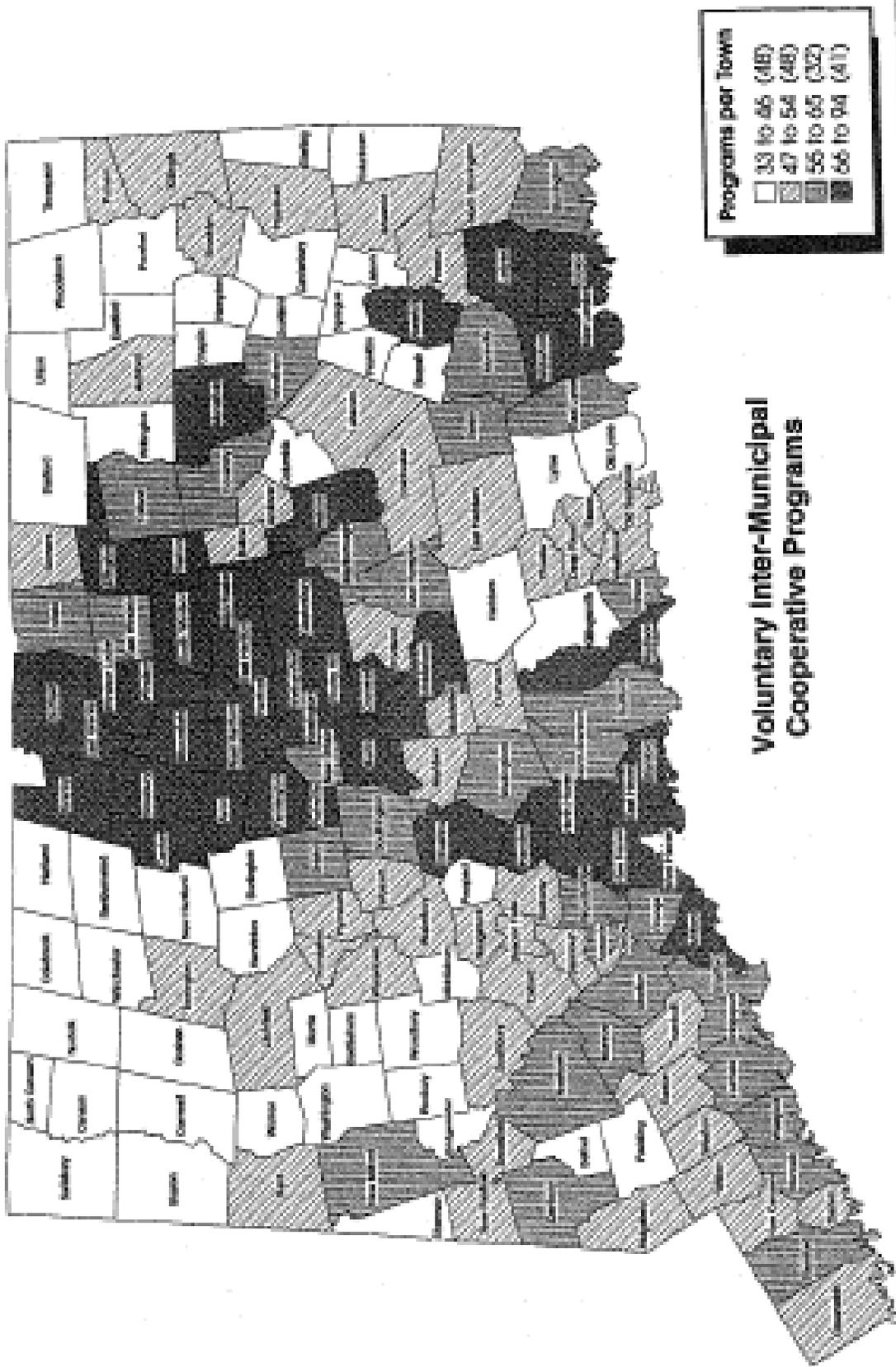
<i>Name of RPO</i>	<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Type of RPO</i>	<i>Location of Office</i>	<i>No. of Towns</i>	<i>No. of Bd. Members</i>	<i>Region (sq. miles)</i>	<i>Popula.</i>	<i>Density (People/ sq. mi.)</i>
Capitol Region Council of Governments	CRCOG	RCOG	Hartford	29	32	762	739,399	970
Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency	CCRPA	RPA	Bristol	7	17	164	232,460	1,417
Conn. River Estuary Regional Planning Agency	CRERPA	RPA	Old Saybrook	9	18	205	62,184	303
Council of Governments of the Central Naugatuck Valley	COGCNV	RCEO	Waterbury	13	13	316	281,401	891
Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency	GBRPA	RPA	Bridgeport	6	18	146	310,739	2,128
Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials	HVCEO	RCEO	Brookfield	10	10	335	221,481	661
Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials	LHCEO	RCEO	Goshen	11	11	417	82,011	197
Midstate Regional Planning Agency	MRPA	RPA	Middletown	8	17	247	109,761	444
Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments	NECCOG	RCOG	Killingly	11	11	420	81,520	194
Northwestern Connecticut Council of Governments	NWCCOG	RCOG	Warren	9	9	359	23,374	65
South Central Regional Council of Governments	SCRCOG	RCOG	North Haven	15	15	387	560,105	1,447
Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments	SCCOG	RCOG	Norwich	18	20 + 4 nonvoting*	559	249,592	446
South Western Regional Planning Agency	SWRPA	RPA	Stamford	8	22	225	362,193	1,610
Valley Council of Governments	VCOG	RCOG	Derby	4	4	58	86,888	1,498
Windham Region Council of Governments	WINCOG	RCOG	Willimantic	10**	9**	327	88,681	271

* Includes both the Town of Groton and the City of Groton as well as the Town of Stonington and the Borough of Stonington. The four non-voting members represent the Mashantucket Pequot tribe, the Mohegan tribe, Submarine Group Two/Naval Region Northeast, and the Coast Guard Academy.

** The town of Stafford (11,815 people within 59 square miles) has never been part of a planning region, but it is considering joining WINCOG, which would give the region 11 towns and a 10-member board. Ashford, which is part of the state-defined region, is no longer participating as a member of the WINCOG board; instead, it attends NECCOG meetings, and it has petitioned to move to that region. For the present time, however, Ashford remains part of the WINCOG geographic area for regional planning purposes.

Sources of data: Connecticut Register and Manual and interviews with individual RPO executive directors and OPM staff.

APPENDIX D



Source: ACIR, Chart A, *Local Government Cooperative Ventures in Connecticut* (June 2000).

Appendix E Shared Services Grants in Other States

	<i>Maine: Efficient Delivery of Local and Regional Services (30-A § 6201)</i>	<i>New Jersey: SHARE Program (N.J. Rev. Stat. 40:8B-14) *</i>	<i>New York: Shared Municipal Services Incentive Program (2006 N.Y. Laws Chapter 50)</i>	<i>Pennsylvania: Shared Municipal Services Program (12 P.A. Code §119)</i>
Year Started	FY 05	FY 04	FY 06	FY 69
Total Funding	FY 05: \$1 million FY 06: \$0 FY 07: \$500,000	FY 05: \$4.2 million FY 06: \$4.2 million FY 07: \$4.2 million	FY 06: \$2.75 million FY 07: \$25.7 million	FY 05: \$1.5 million FY 06: \$1.4 million FY 07: \$2.4 million
Eligible Governments	Municipalities, counties, and regional government agencies	Municipalities, counties, fire districts, and nonprofit organizations that coordinate regional services	Counties, municipalities, and school and special taxing districts	Municipalities and councils of government (COGs)
Eligible Activities and Grant Amounts	Max. \$200,000 grants for joint projects that reduce costs and spending, deliver services more efficiently, or improve their quality and quantity	Max. \$20,000 grants with 10% local match for service sharing or consolidation feasibility studies Max. \$200,000 grants (no local match) to cover start-up, transition, and implementation of cost sharing or consolidating services Max. \$300,000 annual grants to counties for planning and implementing shared services with towns or regional nonprofit organizations	Max. \$200,000 grants for feasibility studies and plans to share, consolidate merge, or dissolve services Max. \$300,000 grants to two or more highway departments for sharing contractual services, making joint purchases or mutually beneficial capital improvements, or consolidating operations Max. \$1 million grants for counties developing countywide shared service plans Max. \$500,000 grants to two or more towns for reducing health insurance costs. Eligible projects include creating local health care consortiums, joining state health insurance program, and employee cost sharing Max. \$2 million matching grants for consolidation or merger cost savings	50% matching grants to cover towns' administrative costs of (1) forming a COG or (2) jointly performing a municipal service
Administering Agency	Department of Administrative and Financial Services	Department of Community Affairs	Department of State	Department of Community and Economic Development

*SHARE is a component of the older Regional Efficiency and Development Incentive Program.

Source: Office of Legislative Research, 2007-R-0047, *Grants for Consolidating Municipal Services*.