

Regional Transportation Advisory Committee

September 7, 2021

9:00 a.m.

**DRAFT** Meeting Minutes

Seat	Representative	Attendance
PACTS Southern – Municipal	Diana Asanza	Y
PACTS Southern – Planning/ Economic Development	Denise Clavette	Y
PACTS Southern – Public Works/ Engineering	Tom Milligan	Y
PACTS Central – Municipal	Matt Sturgis	Y
PACTS Central – Planning/ Economic Development	Nell Donaldson	Y
PACTS Central – Public Works/ Engineering	Doug Howard	
PACTS Western – Municipal	Bill Giroux	
PACTS Western – Planning/ Economic Development	Amanda Lessard	Y
PACTS Western – Public Works/ Engineering	Bob Burns	Y
PACTS Northern – Municipal	Bill Shane	
PACTS Northern – Planning/ Economic Development	Theo Holtwijk	
PACTS Northern – Public Works/ Engineering	Adam Bliss	
Transit	Hank Berg	Y
Transit	Patricia Quinn	Y
Transit	Donna Tippet	Y
Transit	Robert Currie	
MaineDOT	Ryan Neale	Y
Maine Turnpike Authority	Rebecca Grover	Y
Active Transportation Specialist	Jean Sideris	Y
Environmental Specialist	Christian MilNeil	Y
Community Transportation Leader	Leeann Brionez	
Community Transportation Leader	Mireille Kabongo	Y
Private Sector Trade Association	Eamonn Dundon	Y

**1. Welcome**

Nell Donaldson opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. Ryan Neale of the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) is filling in for Dale Doughty, who is the new representative from MaineDOT.

**2. Public Comment**

No public comment was received. Christian MilNeil mentioned that the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) came out with a new report that describes the need for climate action as “Code Red” for humanity. He noted that transportation is one of the biggest sources of pollution in southern Maine and said RTAC, MaineDOT, and the Maine Turnpike Authority should take action.

**3 & 4. Limited Emergency Declaration & Remote Participation Policy**

Chris Chop, GPCOG staff, stated that the next two items relate to remote meetings, with Item 3 being a short-term policy and Item 4 being a longer-term policy. For Item 3, in response to the ever-changing

nature of the pandemic and concerns regarding the ventilation in the GPCOG meeting room while allowing for public occupancy, PACTS is proposing that RTAC declare a limited emergency to continue remote meetings. Chris noted that the GPCOG Executive Committee and the PACTS Policy Board adopted the limited emergency declaration in August.

No public comment was received on Item 3, Limited Emergency Declaration.

Matt Sturgis made a motion to adopt the limited emergency declaration and the remote participation policy. Eamonn Dundon seconded the motion.

Prompted by Kristina Egan, GPCOG staff, Matt specified that his motion was to adopt the limited emergency declaration and the remote participation policy (Item 4).

Tom Milligan asked if, under the remote participation policy, committee members would need permission to be excused from attending meetings in person. Chris Chop explained that the remote participation policy is a long-term policy focused on providing the committee with the ability to participate remotely if the circumstances require it (e.g., extreme weather, travel difficulties, physical geography, etc.). Additionally, this policy allows the public to continue to join the meetings remotely. The limited emergency declaration would supersede the remote participation policy until the COVID numbers decrease and the emergency is lifted.

Kristina mentioned that after the emergency is lifted, RTAC must, by law, return to in-person meetings. The remote participation policy would only allow for individual committee members—who meet the criteria and notify the chair—to attend remotely. The public, however, may continue to attend remotely.

Matt Sturgis noted that it is acceptable for members to be absent from meetings, but once the emergency is lifted, the expectation is in-person meetings.

Kristina clarified that the conference rooms at GPCOG do not have poor ventilation; however, the windows do not open and there is not enough room for physical spacing for RTAC.

No public comment was received on Item 4, Remove Participation Policy.

All members were in favor.

## **5. Approval of the July 6th, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

No public comment was received. Rebecca Grover made a motion to approve the July 6, 2021 meeting minutes. Matt Sturgis seconded the motion. There were 14 votes in favor and 2 abstentions (Jessa Berna and Ryan Neale); the motion carried.

## **6. Staff Report**

Elizabeth Roberts, GPCOG staff, presented an update on the High Crash Location Report. The engineering consulting firm, VHB, was hired in 2019 to perform desktop assessments at 24 high crash locations throughout the PACTS region and then in-depth road safety audits (RSA) for 10 of those locations. The 24 high crash locations were selected by the PACTS Technical Committee. The Technical Committee then provided a recommended list of 10 high crash locations for a full RSA. Full RSAs will be posted on the GPCOG website when they are available.

Elizabeth also presented an update on the PACTS Regional Traffic Management System (RTMS) program, which was started in 2008 with the goal of optimizing the current roadway network through traffic signal management and to provide direct access for remote management and monitoring of the traffic signals in the PACTS region. PACTS adopted a RTMS policy in December 2010 and provided initial funding for this program which included funding for a central server located in a fire station in South Portland and the traffic management software, Streetwise. Due to Streetwise no longer being supported, traffic signal installations cannot connect to the existing server. In 2020, PACTS hired Sebago Technics, an engineering consulting firm, to evaluate options for replacing or upgrading the PACTS RTMS server and software. In June 2021, the RTMS subcommittee voted to pursue the NTCIP Central System option, which would allow different types of signal controllers to connect to the system. The consultant is currently working on costs of a phased implementation of the PACTS server upgrade with an NTCIP system.

Christian MilNeil asked if people who rely on mobility devices, people who are visually impaired, or neighbors were invited to participate in the road safety audits. Elizabeth said information from the high crash location reports was presented at the Technical Committee meeting, which was public. She added that when it was time to visit the 10 locations that were reviewed under RSA, municipalities were allowed to invite anyone they wanted. Elizabeth noted that some municipalities did invite members of the public. Christian suggested that next time there are road safety audits, residents are invited to the meetings to ensure that PACTS is getting all perspectives of the location under review, including from residents who are visually impaired and individuals who rely on wheelchairs.

In response to a question from Eamonn Dundon, Chris Chop confirmed that the RTMS project was submitted to the United States House and Senate as part of the earmarks process. The project was advanced by Senator Angus King's office and is still in the deliberation process; Chris will keep the committee updated. Alternative funding could potentially come from PACTS' federal allocation (i.e., complex projects) or the Holding WIN, which is set aside for emergency purposes, but there are many needs in the region and those are just potential sources.

## **7. CARES Phase II and III Project Updates**

In early 2020, the PACTS region received \$53 million in funding through the CARES Act to support the transit industry during the pandemic. The funds have been allocated in six-month phases. In Phases II (July-December 2020) and III (January-June 2021), funding was allocated to several projects and studies to be managed by GPCOG serving as a subcontractor to METRO, as well as to two transit signal priority projects managed by the Cities of Portland and South Portland:

- Improve Safety and Access for Older Adults, People with Disabilities, and People of Color—The focal point of this project was the creation of the Community Transportation Leaders.
- Public Education and Customer Communications—The first phase of this project created [TransitTogether.org](https://transittogether.org), a website which serves as a hub for transit information in the region. The second phase of this project is a marketing campaign.
- Transit Together—The goal of this project is to bring all the transit agencies in the region together to reimagine existing networks and make improvements. Nelson\Nygaard has been hired as a consultant.
- Rapid Transit Feasibility Study—RTAC received a presentation on this study in June. Outreach meetings have been held and staff has begun drafting a request for proposals (RFP) for consultant services to complete the study.

- Planning for Automatic Passenger Counters (APCs)—APCs are electronic devices that are positioned at the doors of transit vehicles to count how many people enter and exit a vehicle. This information helps transit providers make more informed decisions regarding service changes and enhancements.
- Health and Safety Investments for Volunteer Driver Programs—The main goal of this project was to support volunteer driver programs and provide PPE (personal protective equipment) to organizations that applied for funding; Westbrook and ITN *Portland* were two organizations that benefitted from this program.
- Transit Signal Priority—This project would install devices that would extend the green signal phase for transit vehicles to make them more efficient and competitive with personal vehicles. METRO and South Portland Bus Service are the two organizations that have identified a need for Transit Signal Priority. Neither of these projects has begun.

Future project updates will be available at [gpcog.org/530/CARES-ACT-Project-Updates](https://gpcog.org/530/CARES-ACT-Project-Updates).

Chad Heid of Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach (BSOOB) Transit, speaking as a member of the public, stated that BSOOB Transit would like to be included in the scoping for the Transit Signal Priority project. Regarding APCs, he noted that calibrating the hardware and maintaining the accuracy of the data takes considerable investment. He suggested the APC budget include supporting the intelligent transportation systems (ITS), and said he would be happy to talk more with the Transit Task Force.

Donna Tippettt asked if the information collected for Transit Tomorrow could be used for Transit Together, so staff time is not wasted on gathering information that has already been collected. Donna agreed with Chad that APC systems do not exist on their own; they integrate with AVL (automatic vehicle location) systems. She expressed a desire for the Transit Task Force to discuss the details.

Chris Chop stated that Nelson\Nygaard wanted to have independent conversations with the transit agencies to collect the data they needed for their technical analysis, but staff will coordinate with them and be mindful about any data that has already been requested. Regarding the Transit Task Force, Chris said that Transit Together will have its own committee and each transit provider is on that committee. The Transit Together committee will be responsible for the details of the plan, rather than the Transit Task Force or RTAC.

Christian MilNeil asked if there is an implementation schedule for the Transit Signal Priority project. He also asked if GPCOG/PACTS has conducted a study on AVL data to learn where the biggest traffic congestion bottlenecks or traffic light bottlenecks are on the various transit routes. He believes that this will inform where the top priority transit signal or bus lanes should go. Chris replied that PACTS is not managing the two Transit Signal Priority projects, but PACTS was informed by the two organizations—METRO and South Portland Bus Service—that the projects have not started. Chris also stated that he does not believe PACTS has conducted a study on AVL data to evaluate bottlenecks in transit but thought it was a good suggestion.

Donna Tippettt stated that, in South Portland, CARES Act funding will be used to expand the current system. In Portland, Nell Donaldson said that corridors have been identified and the funds are being used to hire a contractor to design the TSP system, develop cost estimate, and create the bid specs. The plan is to get the work done by Fall 2021.

Mireille Kabongo praised GPCOG/PACTS and public transportation agencies for making sure public transit was accessible, clean, and safe during the pandemic.

## 8. Transit Performance Metrics

Public transit agencies' Agency Safety Plans must include Safety Performance Targets (SPTs) based on the Safety Performance Measures (SPMs) established in the National Public Transportation Safety Plan:

- Total fatalities
- Fatalities per 100,000 vehicle revenue-miles (VRM)
- Total injuries
- Injuries per 100,000 VRM
- Total safety events
- Safety events per 100,000 VRM
- System reliability

PACTS, as the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), is responsible for integrating into the planning process, performance measures and targets, including SPTs, from local transit agencies' safety plans and the state department of transportation. Transit agencies submit their safety plans to PACTS, which uses those targets to inform their own.

In addition, FTA guidelines require that MPOs take a performance-based approach to planning but does permit some leeway to local leaders as they establish specific measures. Some potential categories for RTAC's consideration are:

- Asset management (condition of vehicles, stops, and stations)
- Financial efficiency (spending per rider, per mile)
- Operations (schedule adherence, frequency, crowding standards)
- Ridership (high ridership corridors balanced with the need for regional coverage)
- Equity and public outreach (customer service)

Staff is seeking suggestions on the development of regional Transit Performance Targets.

No public comment was made.

Hank Berg expressed his concern regarding the presentation of the metrics, specifically the system reliability of the ferries. He stated that it does not look good when compared to other modes, but noted that it is better than industry standards. Hank recommended that the metrics be separated by mode and compared with industry standards.

Christian MilNeil stated that the safety metrics look good. He mentioned that schedule adherence is something that is important to riders because they need to trust that the bus is going to be on time. Additionally, he believes PACTS needs to analyze system equity to ensure frequent service to affordable housing in the region, to areas where there are more people of color, and to transit-dependent riders. Donna Tippettt cautioned that when looking at equity, census tracts can be too large to provide meaningful information. She includes Housing Authority project information to identify transit-dependent riders living within a neighborhood that is above the poverty line.

Patricia Quinn expressed concern regarding the safety information presented and suggested separating employee fatalities and injuries from rider fatalities and injuries.

Tom Milligan expressed concerns about the same information and requested clarification on how fatalities were measured (e.g., accident, suicide, etc.). He also stated that asset management is a good metric to focus on and helps ensure that all other metrics fall into place—that public transit is clean, safe, and efficient.

Eamonn Dundon said financial efficiency is important and financial metrics should align with the goals of Transit Together.

Kristina Egan clarified the committee's recommendations and summarized the main suggestions as analyzing safety metrics by mode, reliability / schedule adherence, asset management, equity (with better geographic data), financial efficiency, and customer service.

## **9. 2022-2023 Draft Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)**

Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are required to create a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) that documents the metropolitan transportation planning activities that will be performed over a 2-year period. The transportation planning tasks identified in the UPWP are funded through a combination of federal, state, and municipal sources. The estimated two-year funding level is \$2.7 million. MaineDOT will allow MPOs to carry over up to 15% of unused funds from the previous UPWP. Those funds will be used, alongside the proposed budget, to fund projects like *Connect 2045*. This project will help inform the vision, goals, and objectives for the region, which will help set investment strategies.

In June 2021, staff took draft priorities to the Executive Board for discussion and input. Staff refined the projects and presented them to the PACTS Policy Board, along with proposed budgets, in July. MaineDOT provided feedback in August. Staff is presenting the draft program to RTAC for information and discussion. The tasks include:

1. Coordination & Administration. Task 1 includes supporting PACTS' three standing committees, engaging the region's residents and stakeholders, communicating with the media, etc.
2. Program and Seek Funds. Task 2 includes PACTS' annual programming of \$25 million in federal and state roadway and transit funds. PACTS will also monitor the delivery of capital projects, which are projects in design or construction. Finally, PACTS seeks to bring additional funding to the region, including discretionary grants.
3. Plan for the Future. Task 3 includes *Connect 2045*, advancing recommendations from *Transit Tomorrow*, and coordinating with other organizations.
4. Implement Plans and Mobility Improvements. Task 4 includes the advancement of RTMS, support of Maine Clean Communities, and more.

No public comment was made.

Patricia Quinn asked if the budget included staff and consultant time and, if so, she requested a breakdown. Chris Chop answered that the budget does include staff and consultant time, but he did not have a breakdown readily available. He noted that some of the staff/consultant time will be project-specific. He also explained that UPWP funds are strictly for planning and cannot be used for construction or design.

Christian MilNeil asked about the regional travel demand model and suggested it be updated to reflect the state's goal of achieving 20% reductions in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 2030. Chris Chop said the travel model is part of the *Connect 2045* work and GPCOG will be relying on a consultant but can investigate Christian's suggestion. Kristina added that most travel demand models are limited as to how well they predict transit use, biking, and walking. She added that the land use component of modeling is very important.

Jessa Berna stated that enhanced project scoping is important but does not want to limit it to the projects that applied but were not eligible for a PDR. She added that there may be municipalities that did not submit projects because they did not have the enhanced scoping ready and felt they could not submit for PDR funding.

Donna Tippet stated that *Transit Tomorrow* includes increasing frequency and she would like to see increasing frequency be made a priority for funding in the region. Chris Chop noted that frequency is mentioned on page 29 under (3c) *Transit Tomorrow: Create Frequent Connections*. The UPWP includes \$32,000 for this, which is meant to supplement Transit Together. Staff sees Transit Together as the vehicle for identifying needed investments in the region. Kristina Egan added that the CARES allocation is not reflected in the UPWP, which has a significant amount of funding going toward Transit Together.

Eamonn Dundon, in response to Tom Milligan's comment that land use policy discussions need to happen on a regional level to be effective, asked where collaboration on land use studies with the region and state are in the UPWP tasks. Chris Chop answered that it can be found under (1h) *Communications & Engagement* on page 28 and (3f) *Coordination of External Projects* on page 30. Kristina Egan added (3e) *Transit Tomorrow: Create Transit Friendly Places*, since it includes a plan for growth and encourages infill development. She added that there is not enough funding for land use in transportation planning. Additionally, the Metro Regional Coalition's top priority is expanding housing choices. Kristina stated that Jeff Levine has completed two phases of a study that shows how little land allows multi-family housing. PACTS is looking at Jeff Levine's study to see how municipalities can remove barriers to allow for more multi-family housing.

## **10. Report on Complex Projects Selection**

In July 2021, RTAC discussed complex projects and made recommendations to the PACTS Policy Board. The Policy Board requested more financial analysis and forecasting and, after reviewing, staff recommended removing either the Portland Libbytown project or the Saco-Biddeford Multimodal Bridge or both. Both projects have construction estimates that are greater than PACTS' entire annual allocation. The PACTS Policy Board decided not to fund the Saco-Biddeford Bridge, and to cap future construction funding for Portland's Libbytown project at \$3 million. PACTS will be reviewing complex projects policies after requests from both RTAC and the Policy Board.

No public comment was made.

Eamonn Dundon stated that he believes the municipalities that agree to supplement construction costs with their own funds should score higher on the funding framework. Approving projects that do not have huge construction costs leaves more funds for other projects.

Christian MilNeil agreed that the funding framework policy needs an update, considering how limited the funds are. Additionally, he stated that funding outdated projects is not a good use of PACTS funds. Christian also stated that if the policy allows for funding to be capped at a certain amount, this should happen on more projects. He added that projects with outside funding that can be used as a match to PACTS funding should be given more consideration, and that should be represented in the policy.

Jessa Berna agreed the funding process needs to be addressed, noting that the recommendation RTAC voted on was not the final recommendation to the PACTS Policy Board. Additionally, she added that negotiation should have been offered to projects that were rejected, specifically to those that

scored higher and were denied funding. Donna Tippettt agreed that she did not know top scoring projects could be denied funding and that more clarification on the process is needed.

Matthew Sturgis expressed how difficult it was to make these decisions, noting that overcommitting funds was the main concern, which is why a more conservative approach was recommended and approved. He added that conversations should be had with the state to see what funding they can provide for complex projects.

Tom Milligan suggested that PACTS investigate having a back-up list of projects that could be funded in case something happens with a funded project or additional funding becomes available.

Chris Chop stated that staff will be recommending assembling a task force of RTAC and Policy Board members to evaluate the project selection policies. He clarified that he does not believe this group needs to review the scoring metrics.

Kristina Egan added that the task force will be looking into whether municipalities that put in more local match should be advantaged, how to protect PACTS' limited allocation of funding from cost overruns, how to balance big projects and small projects, etc.

## **11. Adjourn**

With no objection, the meeting was adjourned.