

**Regional Transportation Advisory Committee**

March 1, 2021

9:00 a.m.

Meeting Minutes

Approved on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Seat	Representative	Attendance
PACTS Southern – Municipal	Diana Asanza	Y
PACTS Southern – Planning/ Economic Development	Jessa Berna	Y
PACTS Southern – Public Works/ Engineering	Tom Milligan	Y
PACTS Central – Municipal	Matt Sturgis	
PACTS Central – Planning/ Economic Development	Nell Donaldson	Y
PACTS Central – Public Works/ Engineering	Doug Howard	Y
PACTS Western – Municipal	Bill Giroux	
PACTS Western – Planning/ Economic Development	Amanda Lessard	
PACTS Western – Public Works/ Engineering	Tom Poirier	Y
PACTS Northern – Municipal	Bill Shane	Y
PACTS Northern – Planning/ Economic Development	Theo Holtwijk	Y
PACTS Northern – Public Works/ Engineering	Adam Bliss	Y
Transit	Hank Berg	Y
Transit	Patricia Quinn	Y
Transit	Jack DeBeradinis	Y
Transit	Mike Tremblay	Y
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	Y
Community Transportation Leader	Mireille Kabongo	
Private Sector Trade Association	Eamonn Dundon	Y

**1. Welcome**

Nell Donaldson opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

She introduced the two new representatives on the committee from the region’s transit agencies – Mike Tremblay from Greater Portland METRO (METRO) and Jack DeBeradinis from Regional Transportation Program (RTP).

**2. Public Comment**

No public comment was made.

**3. Approval of the December 7, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

No public comment was made. Bill Shane moved to approve the December 7, 2021 minutes. Rebecca Grover seconded the motion. There were 16 votes in favor and 0 opposed.

#### 4. Staff Report

##### *February 1, 2022 Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) Meeting Notes*

The February 1, 2022 RTAC meeting was optional for RTAC members and there were no action items on the agenda. The agenda stated that minutes would not be taken, but GPCOG staff prepared informal meeting notes with time stamps for anyone who would like to review the discussions. RTAC members did not need to vote to approve the meeting notes.

##### *Transit Driver Recruitment Video*

GPCOG staff created a driver recruitment video for the region's transit agencies to use. Staff will create tailored versions for each agency with agency-specific information about how to apply for a job. The videos can be viewed [here](#).

#### 5. PACTS Municipal Partnership Initiative (MPI) Project Review

The PACTS MPI program allocates \$1.6 million annually toward roadway rehabilitation, preservation and multi-modal improvements. The funds are distributed evenly to the four PACTS Subregions and then projects are selected at subregional meetings held between participating municipalities. Each project requires a minimum 50% local match.

Staff noted this year's projects largely include aspects of multi-modal and intersection safety improvements, with two projects also including paving within their scopes.

Bill Shane moved to recommend the list of projects as presented in the agenda; Tom Milligan seconded the motion. There were 18 votes in favor and none opposed.

#### 6. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Public Transportation Project Review [19:45]

In August 2021, the PACTS Policy Board voted to use PACTS Transportation Funding Framework to allocate the region's ARPA funds. The region's transit agencies submitted a total of ten applications which were scored according to a quantitative analysis and an external scoring committee.

The PACTS Policy Board also asked staff to identify and prioritize needs through 2023 for the remaining CARES funds. Staff identified a \$3.8 million shortfall for operating needs.

At the onset of the pandemic, PACTS identified two strategies for pandemic relief funding: operational funding for the region's existing transit system, and investing in the system to catalyze long-term ridership recovery and growth. When balancing these two strategies, other considerations include: 1) an estimated \$5 million increase in the region's annual allocation of Section 5307 funding through the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which would address the operations shortfall with the exception of Casco Bay Lines and NNEPRA (Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority) as they are ineligible for Section 5307 funding; 2) IIJA funding increases for discretionary grant programs, and 3) additional funding made available through the Federal Railroad Administration.

Nell Donaldson invited public comment on this item:

- Donna Tippet, South Portland Bus Service (SPBS), expressed concern that throughout preliminary meetings, PACTS officers and GPCOG staff had placed priority on innovation, modernization, and transit coordination. As such, SPBS submitted project applications focused on those priorities. Donna stated that three of the four highest scoring applications were focused on increasing operating funds and did not align with what she had interpreted as the region's

priorities for these funds. Donna added she felt the transit agencies should reconvene as a task force and use the *Transit Together* and *Transit Stop Access* plans to decide on how to divide the available funding.

- Kenneth Capron, Portland resident, stated that he would prefer to see these funds put towards transportation entities that are being subsidized by local taxpayers on a proportional basis.
- Chad Heid, Biddeford-Saco-Old Orchard Beach (BSOOB) Transit, added to Donna Tippet's comments regarding the focus on operating funding. Chad offered that, under Option 2, funds for the Maine Medical Center (MMC) Scarborough Campus Transit Infrastructure Enhancement and BSOOB Transit Enhanced Customer Information projects could potentially be put towards operating funding instead, if the discussion heads toward a more granular analysis of funding individual projects.

Mike Tremblay, METRO, expressed strong support for Option 1, noting the intent to bring back ridership by improving service and making investments in the system. Later, Mike acknowledged METRO would support Option 3a in the spirit of cooperation.

Eamon Dundon, Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce, stated support for Option 3a due to the balance of funding for innovative projects and operational support for entities not eligible for Section 5307 funds.

Hank Berg, Casco Bay Lines, expressed his support for previous statements by Donna Tippet and Chad Heid. Hank added that he hopes in the future transit agencies will be provided the opportunity to work collaboratively to reach decisions. Hank also stated that the original call for projects called for "innovative" projects, while many of the projects being considered are for expansion or improvements of the current system. If these are to be considered, Hank would like to afford all agencies the opportunity to submit similar projects. Hank added that using the Funding Framework puts Casco Bay Lines at a disadvantage because Casco Bay Lines cannot expand and land use is a non-factor. He also added the Funding Framework was developed prior to the pandemic and should not be considered appropriate for allocating ARPA and CARES funding. Hank summarized by stating he believes the CARES deficit should be fully funded and the remaining ARPA funds should be used in accordance with ARPA laws with an emphasis on operating funds, consistent guidelines, and full disclosure of costs beyond the ARPA funding. GPCOG staff clarified that they found all projects under consideration to be in compliance with the ARPA law.

Patricia Quinn, NNEPRA, also expressed support for fully funding the CARES deficit. She also noted that ridership numbers fluctuated with the increase in Delta variant cases in the fall, after the August 2021 Policy Board meeting. Patricia added that operations and innovation are not necessarily mutually exclusive for all agencies. Patricia expressed reservations about funding service improvements while improvement studies are still ongoing. She added that Option 2 best meets what she has understood to be the priorities for pandemic relief funding and would not support any other option.

METRO's preference for Option 1 was significant for Christian MilNeil, who cited METRO's standing as the region's largest transit provider. Christian also noted his belief that the discounted fare program is an important piece in rebuilding ridership. Christian expressed full support for Option 1 and noted that he did not like Option 3a.

Eamonn Dundon stated he had a strong preference for Option 1 upon entering the meeting; however, he acknowledged that such a large committee will have conflicting points of view and hopes the group can work toward a consensus. Patricia Quinn followed up Eamonn's statement indicating there likely won't be a unanimous consensus without further analysis of impacts on ridership.

Bill Shane moved to recommend Option 3a to the PACTS Policy Board; Eamonn Dundon seconded the motion.

There were 14 votes in favor and 5 opposed; the motion carried. Tom Milligan, Hank Berg, Patricia Quinn, Jack DeBeradinis, and Leeann Brionez were opposed to the motion.

## **7. Community Transportation Leaders Presentation**

The Community Transportation Leaders (CTL) program was developed to create input opportunities for older adults, people with disabilities, people of color, and people with limited incomes. The CTL program provides PACTS with the perspective of individuals who experience transportation barriers. After a successful pilot cohort, GPCOG excitedly welcomes a second cohort of Community Transportation Leaders. Kat Violette, GPCOG staff, introduced the CTL members and invited them to present to the committee.

Several CTL members expressed the program has provided a voice and outlet for their needs. Rustam Ahmadov, Zemfira Ahmadova, and Bill Higgins discussed the barriers associated with bus routes and how improvements can make a difference. Limited bus routes make it difficult for users to access essential services such as food, healthcare, work, and childcare. Some riders experienced route changes without notice. The CTL members suggested a real-time display showing bus routes and locations, and adding a bus route to serve more rural communities without transit, such as Gray and Cape Elizabeth. They also expressed the need for additional public outreach regarding route changes and service.

Mary Gagnon and Sadie Donell spoke to the need for improved services for users with impairments. Current paratransit service is inadequate for the needs of users, in part due to a lack of innovation as there is only one paratransit provider in the region. Many people with impairments rely upon paratransit services to work and access other needs. The CTL members recommended the paratransit provider should provide transparent planning, featuring analysis, goal-setting, and measurable outcomes, as well as increased funding to support wage increases, employee retention, training, and improved scheduling systems. It was also emphasized that equitable service for riders with impairments is not a courtesy, but a human right.

Immaculee Kaboza presented on behalf of individuals with limited English proficiency facing transportation barriers. Public transportation is often the first form of transportation for immigrants and asylum seekers entering Maine, but with a lack of accessible information it is hard to navigate the system. Much of the information that is available is only available in English, making it difficult for new speakers to use public transportation. The CTL members suggested using a signaling system on the bus to indicate when a bus is starting, approaching a stop, and stopping. They also recommended more signs that can be interpreted and used by all users and provide information about how to retrieve any lost items on a bus.

Carol Kilroy, Roseline Soubelle, and Yvonne Elinga discussed transit rider safety, the need for improved collaboration between drivers and riders, and route frequency. Riders have experienced occasions when buses have missed stops or bus stops have not been cleared of snow. The CTL

members proposed simplifying maps and signs to make them easier to understand and synchronizing bus clocks with map clocks so riders can catch the bus.

METRO announced they will be holding a public meeting on March 8<sup>th</sup> to discuss an update to their Title VI document and can provide accommodations upon request.

South Portland Bus Service (SPBS) acknowledged the reported need for additional driver training to minimize missed stops. SPBS also expressed their interest in increasing the number of stops along their routes.

Riders were encouraged to contact transit providers directly if there are immediate needs or improvements that can be addressed, such as snow-covered bus stops or missed bus stops along existing routes.

## **8. Other Business**

No other business was discussed.

## **9. Adjourn**

Eamonn Dundon moved to adjourn, and Mike Tremblay seconded the motion. With no objection, the meeting was adjourned.