

Regional Transportation Advisory Committee

April 5, 2022

9:00 a.m.

Meeting Minutes

Approved on May 3, 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	
PACTS Western – Municipal	Bill Giroux	
PACTS Western – Planning/ Economic Development	Amanda Lessard	Y
PACTS Western – Public Works/ Engineering	Katherine Kelley	Y
PACTS Northern – Municipal	Bill Shane	Y
PACTS Northern – Planning/ Economic Development	Theo Holtwijk	
PACTS Northern – Public Works/ Engineering	Adam Bliss	Y
Transit	Hank Berg	Y
Transit	Patricia Quinn	Y
Transit	Jack DeBeradinis	
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	
Community Transportation Leader	Mireille Kabongo	Y
Private Sector Trade Association	Eamonn Dundon	Y

1. Welcome

Nell Donaldson opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

2. Public Comment

No public comment was made.

3. Approval of the March 1, 2022 Meeting Minutes

No public comment was made. Rebecca Grover moved to approve the March 1, 2022 minutes. Diana Asanza seconded the motion. There were 14 votes in favor, 0 opposed, and Dale Doughty abstained.

4. Staff Report

President Biden Signs FY22 Spending Bill

On Tuesday, March 15, 2022, the President signed a \$1.5 trillion spending bill which appropriates government funds through the remainder of Fiscal Year 2022 (through September 2022). The United

States Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) agencies will now be able to take advantage of the funding increases promised by Congress under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill (BIL) / Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The next step will be for federal agencies to issue notice of funding opportunities for discretionary grant programs; PACTS will pursue funding for projects that align with *Connect 2045*.

Casco Bay Lines Wins Discretionary Grant for Diesel-Electric Propulsion System

Casco Bay Lines will receive \$3,600,000 through the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA's) Passenger Ferry Grant to implement a diesel-electric hybrid propulsion system in its down-bay replacement vessel, which is programmed for 2022 and 2023. This competitive grant will free up \$3,600,000 in FTA 5307 funding for the region's transit providers.

Metro Receives Discretionary Funding to Replace/Upgrade Four (4) Buses

Congresswoman Pingree's office recently notified Greater Portland Metro that the agency was awarded its full request of \$1,887,000 in federal discretionary funding to fund 85% of the cost to replace/upgrade the four (4) existing BREEZ shuttles. Receiving the federal discretionary funds means the region's federal formula funding won't be impacted and can be put to other uses.

Chair and Vice Chair Terms

The terms for the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) Chair Nell Donaldson and Vice Chair Rebecca Grover align with the fiscal year. Staff will distribute an email seeking nominations for replacements in the coming weeks.

5. Rapid Transit Study

Ericka Amador, GPCOG staff, introduced herself as the new project manager and announced that Nelson\Nygaard has been hired as the consultant for the Rapid Transit Study. The project team has met with the Westbrook City Council, Portland Sustainability and Transportation Committee, and Congresswoman Pingree's office.

Public transportation is a focus for PACTS because the Greater Portland area is growing, building our way out of congestion is not possible, environmental impacts of the current transportation network are unsustainable, and people and the economy depend upon reliable transportation. Additionally, improving rapid transit was one of the recommendations from *Transit Tomorrow*, the region's long-range transit plan approved by PACTS in March 2021.

Transit Tomorrow identified four corridors for rapid transit: 1) Gorham-Westbrook-Portland, 2) Biddeford-Saco-Portland, 3) Brunswick-Portland, 4) North Windham-Portland-South Portland.

Rapid transit is public transportation on a fixed route that improves speed, capacity, reliability, and quality of service for riders. Examples include Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), streetcars, commuter rail, personal rapid transit (Morgantown, WV), and the Monongahela Incline (Pittsburgh, PA).

Features of rapid transit stops include an enhanced station with variable messaging and weather protection, off-board fare collection, and an elevated platform. Rapid transit network features include dedicated bus lanes, traffic signal priority, and prominent branding. Examples were presented from Brunswick (ME), Cleveland (OH), and Richmond (VA). Cleveland saw an additional 4.5 million riders during the first ten years and thus avoided producing 30,000 tons of carbon emissions. They also saw a \$190 return in economic development for every \$1 spent on their rapid transit system.

The first step for the PACTS study is for the internal project team to meet with the consultant and share a list of potential project advisory group members. The study timeline is 16-18 months, beginning in April 2022.

Tom Milligan highlighted the need to balance funding innovative projects, such as rapid transit, while maintaining the infrastructure used by passenger vehicles and transit. Christian MilNeil also acknowledged the need to focus on innovation as the current funding for the region cannot sustain infrastructure preservation under the existing demands of traffic. Christian expressed optimism that rapid transit development could create ancillary development to provide economic benefit to the region. Later, Tom returned to issue of financing and cited larger cities having much larger tax bases to fund their own rapid transit projects.

Mike Tremblay was excited at the prospect of rapid transit as it can be a competitive alternative to single occupancy vehicles when it comes to speed of travel. Mike asked that the study assess what steps can be taken to prepare infrastructure for rapid transit throughout the region. Chris Chop, GPCOG staff, added that many of the easier tasks will be identified by *Transit Together*, a PACTS transit study intended to identify opportunities for increased coordination and integration among the seven public transit providers in the region.

6. Gorham Connector Project Update

Peter Mills, Executive Director of the Maine Turnpike Authority (MTA), and Paul Godfrey, HNTB, presented an update on the proposed Gorham Connector.

In 2007, MTA and MaineDOT were tasked by the legislature with assessing alternatives to resolve mobility issues west of Portland, particularly along Route 22 and Route 114. A 2012 study suggested 3 alternatives: 1) expand transit opportunities along the corridor, 2) develop land use planning policies intended to relieve congestion, and 3) resolve highway congestion by widening local roads or building a separate limited-access highway to divert traffic away from Route 22 and Route 114.

A 2015 PACTS study—the *PACTS Transit Supportive Development Study*—recommended five locations for village development. One location identified was the “Overlap” area where Routes 22 and 114 merge for a short length. The recommendation identified the need to reduce traffic along that section of road to develop a village center. The four PACTS municipalities involved in this study petitioned the legislature to amend the MTA charge to develop such a separate limited-access highway connecting I-95 and South Gorham.

MTA has a tentative alignment for this highway and has taken steps to preserve the route. Soon, MTA will take steps to engage stakeholders who may be affected by the alignment in Scarborough and Gorham. Peter Mills also noted that Gorham had recently revised ordinances to no longer require single-family housing in certain areas of South Gorham, near the “Overlap,” and the language now encourages multi-family housing.

As proposed, the Gorham Connector would not use any federal funding and would be exempt from the PACTS MPO process. MTA does not require PACTS approval and PACTS has not taken a voluntary stance on the Gorham Connector. MTA has expressed interest in public input on the project.

Christian MilNeil made several points in opposition to the Gorham Connector project. Notably, Christian identified decade-old data, low electric vehicle sales throughout the state, the study’s statement that there will be increased traffic on I-295, the study’s projection that vehicle miles travelled will increase, and lost productivity due to added congestion.

Peter Mills contended that the current corridor is too congested for transit. Peter also noted several other locations where transit was a realistic alternative. Paul Godfrey added that the most recent alternatives analysis used more recent data than the 2012 study and they will conduct further evaluation of induced demand by the potential highway.

Eamonn Dundon stated concerns regarding Scarborough's current growth cap, which limits the number of housing units that can be built in any given year. Eamonn also asked about the approval process, to which Peter Mills responded that the regulatory process requires permit from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Army Corps of Engineers. Peter also suggested that Scarborough should consider pursuing the village development in the areas of Route 114 where congestion will be relieved if the Gorham Connector is built.

Jean Sideris commented that moving traffic onto highways runs counter to the idea of developing village centers along the corridor. Peter Mills emphasized that the solution should be multi-faceted and that any congestion created through the project should be prevented intelligently through the use of land use planning and transit. Paul Godfrey also reiterated that the solution will need to be a multi-faceted approach.

Christian MilNeil asked if MTA would be assuming funding responsibility for the auxiliary infrastructure needs created by the Gorham Connector, such as sidewalks and bike lanes. Peter Mills stated MTA was committed to contributing to measures deemed appropriate for preserving the capacity of the highway. Peter cited other instances where MTA has contributed to supporting other modes of transportation.

The four municipalities involved in the project (Scarborough, Gorham, South Portland, and Westbrook) will be requesting GPCOG's participation in the public engagement process. Kristina Egan and Chris Chop, both GPCOG staff, will be participating in the advisory group for this project.

7. Connect 2045 Project Update

The *Connect 2045* plan's main function is to develop three major elements: 1) existing conditions, 2) vision and goals, and 3) objectives/strategies, performance targets, and projects. The existing conditions section of the plan is nearly completed; staff have gathered the necessary information and are drafting the plan now. The vision and goals for *Connect 2045* were adopted by the PACTS Policy Board in November 2021. Over the next six months, PACTS will be focused on addressing the objectives/strategies and performance targets.

Since January, PACTS has met with approximately two-thirds of *Connect 2045* stakeholders, including municipalities and transit providers. PACTS expects to hold a public workshop in May and present draft objectives/strategies and performance targets to the Policy Board in July. The rest of the calendar year will be dedicated to drafting the plan.

PACTS will issue a call for projects in April, which will close at the end of May. The intent of the call for projects is to align the plan with projects that will actually be funded through the PACTS process. Scoring will take place in June and staff will develop fiscally constrained and aspirational project lists. The draft lists will be presented to the Policy Board in July.

8. Regional Complete Streets Policy

GPCOG staff presented on the Regional Complete Streets Policy process at the end of 2021, but received new guidance from the Federal Highway Administration and wanted to update the PACTS

committees about the policy development progress. MaineDOT is also updating their own Complete Streets Policy.

Most of the feedback from PACTS stakeholders has been centered around context-specific policy, clear design guidelines, clear and abundant exceptions, and project funding implications.

Complete streets best practices include: 1) ensuring the policy applies to all project phases and project types, 2) tying the policy to scoring and funding, 3) technical assistance and checklists, and 4) adopting performance measures to evaluate effectiveness.

The next step is to present to the PACTS Executive Board and RTAC for feedback. A draft will likely be presented in May. The PACTS Policy Board will be asked vote to adopt the policy in July.

Christian MilNeil suggested PACTS consider MassDOT's method for evaluating a roadway's potential for everyday biking and walking based on jobs, residences, and access to retail. Mapping potential for everyday biking and walking could be used for prioritizing complete streets investments.

Mike Tremblay emphasized the importance of providing the most up-to-date best practices to municipalities. Mike also mentioned that roadways lacking sidewalks make it difficult to provide transit, because Metro cannot build a bus stop without a landing area.

9. Other Business

No other business was discussed.

10. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:55 AM.