

Gorham-Westbrook-Portland Rapid Transit Study

Project Advisory Group (PAG)

December 8, 2022

10:00–11:15 am

Meeting Notes

Attendees: Jeremiah Bartlett and Nell Donaldson (City of Portland); Mayor Foley (City of Westbrook), Ari Ofsevit, (Federal Transit Administration); Rebecca Grover (Maine Turnpike Authority); Greg Jordan and Mike Tremblay (GP Metro); Patricia Quinn (NNEPRA); Eamonn Dundon (Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce); Kevin Jensen (Town of Gorham); Ryan Neale (MaineDOT); Mike Arsnow (MaineHealth); Justin Barker (Portland Housing Authority)

Project Team in Attendance: Ericka Amador, Chris Chop, and Andrew Clark (GPCOG); Theresa Carr, Joe Poirier, and Suzie Birdsell (NelsonWyggaard); Anne Galbraith (ASG Planning)

Welcome & Project Update

Ericka Amador, GPCOG project manager, welcomed PAG members and gave an overview of the meeting agenda. Anne Galbraith provided a project update noting that the consultant team has completed the existing conditions assessment and the first round of public outreach. The project is now beginning to develop, screen, and evaluate alternatives. Three more PAG meetings are anticipated.

Outreach Recap

Joe Poirier recapped stakeholder outreach conducted to-date, including public outreach held over several weeks this fall. Public outreach included both a virtual and in-house public meeting, six pop-up events at local activity centers, and a survey (available in five languages). The pop-ups and the survey were the most successful in obtaining public feedback; the survey had 350 respondents and Joe shared some feedback.

Which project goal is most important to you? The top four survey responses were:

1. Reducing pollution
2. Providing access to jobs, education, services, or other opportunities
3. Reducing traffic congestion
4. Making transit more convenient and attractive than driving

When viewed by municipality, responses were slightly different. Gorham residents picked “reducing traffic congestion” as the highest priority; Westbrook responses were similar to the overall findings, but put more emphasis on making transit more attractive, connecting regional destinations, and transit-oriented development (TOD). Portland residents also put more emphasis on TOD, as well as access to jobs and other opportunities.

What right-of-way should rapid transit be on? 36% suggested Route 25 or Brighton Avenue, 27% suggested “an existing or underutilized rail corridor,” and 17% suggested Route 302 or Forest Avenue.

What places are most important to serve? Schools/colleges (26%) was the top choice. Other top responses included downtown Portland and existing transportation hubs.

PAG Questions/Discussion

- Did the survey include USM students? Perhaps that is why “colleges” were a top destination?
 - The survey did not ask for student status, but only 6% of respondents were age 18-24.
- It seems odd that “access to jobs” was rated highly, but “access to employment centers” was rated low. There seems to be a disconnect.
 - Perhaps respondents didn’t fully understand the similarity between the two.
- The rights-of-way identified are surprisingly specific. It would be interesting to map them. Maybe Route 25/Brighton Avenue was identified because it is the existing Husky Line route.

Given that the in-person public meeting was less successful than other outreach methods, the PAG was asked what they thought about only offering a virtual meeting for Round #2 outreach this winter.

- One PAG member suggested that meeting people “where they are” (e.g., at hubs or other events) seems to work well. Another member suggested that virtual outreach seems reasonable for the winter, especially if online materials are available for a longer period of time.

The project team agreed to focus on virtual outreach for the winter, yet asked PAG members to share information on any large public events happening in the study area in late February or early March. GPCOG offered to help advertise any virtual events by hanging flyers or other materials at activity centers along the corridor.

Screening Review

Theresa Carr, Nelson/Nygaard project manager, shared updates to the Project Purpose and Goals made in response to past PAG comments and input from the public. The Project Purpose and Goals will now be used to guide the consultant team over the next three months as they evaluate potential alternatives using a three-step evaluation process. These steps are:

1. **Step A: Screening** – a high-level screening of a wide range of ideas against the Project Purpose.
2. **Step B: Tier 1 Evaluation** – evaluating section-level alignments against more specific criteria related to project goals, but still by geographic section. Remaining section-level alignments will be grouped into full route alignments.
3. **Step C: Tier 2 Evaluation** – a more detailed evaluation of a short list of full route alternatives.

Step A evaluated a wide range of alignment ideas generated through stakeholder interviews, a resource agency meeting, public outreach, and PAG comments. A total of 17 unique section-level alignments passed through this screening. (Note: because all alignment options on the Peninsula meet the Project Purpose, these will not be evaluated until Step B). Five segments were eliminated after Step

A, mainly because they did not connect activity centers or begin/end in one of the three study communities.

PAG Questions/Discussion

- Did Step A consider land-use densities?
 - Yes. We considered whether each section-level alignment offers sufficient land-use density to support rapid transit. All section-level alignments passed because the Step A criteria generously assumed that any section-level alignment *could* have such density in the future, and because a small portion of all section-level alignments were near some level of transit-supportive density. The team will consult with the three study-area municipalities about future land use as part of Step B.

Our Evaluation Framework

Suzie Birdsell, Nelson/Nygaard, presented the Tier 1 evaluation criteria. It will use a mix of more detailed quantitative and qualitative factors that are still tied to project goals.

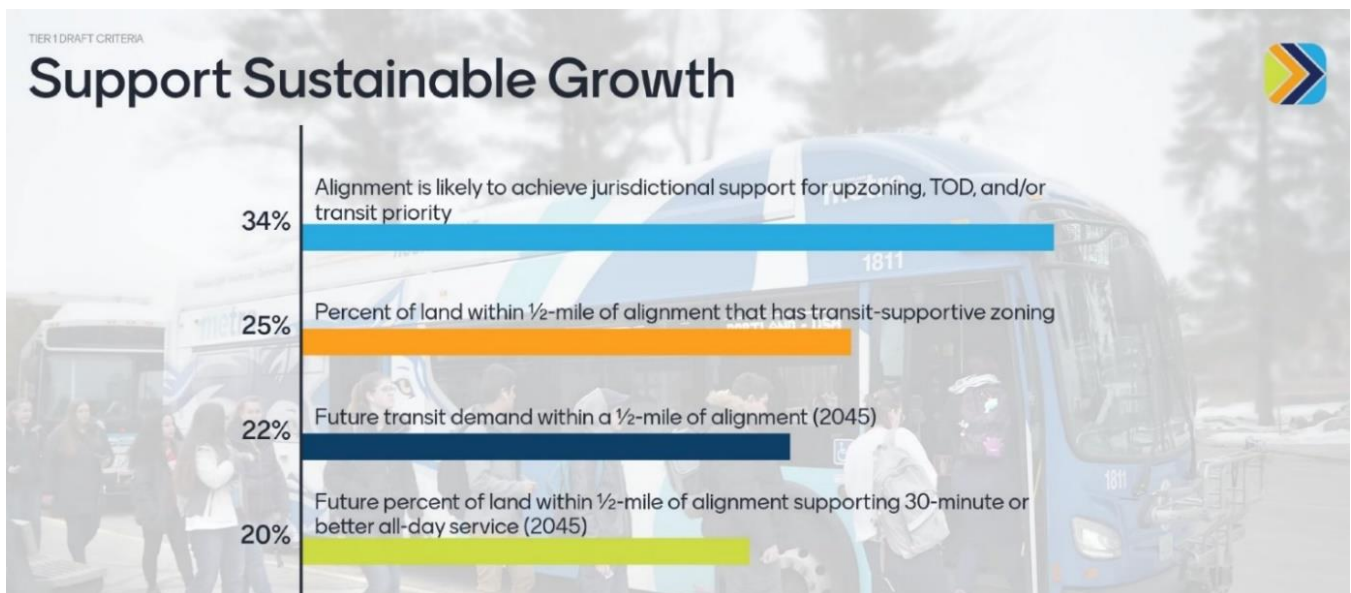
PAG Poll Results and Discussion

PAG members were polled to better understand their priorities and thoughts about each criteria. The results and PAG discussion are summarized below.

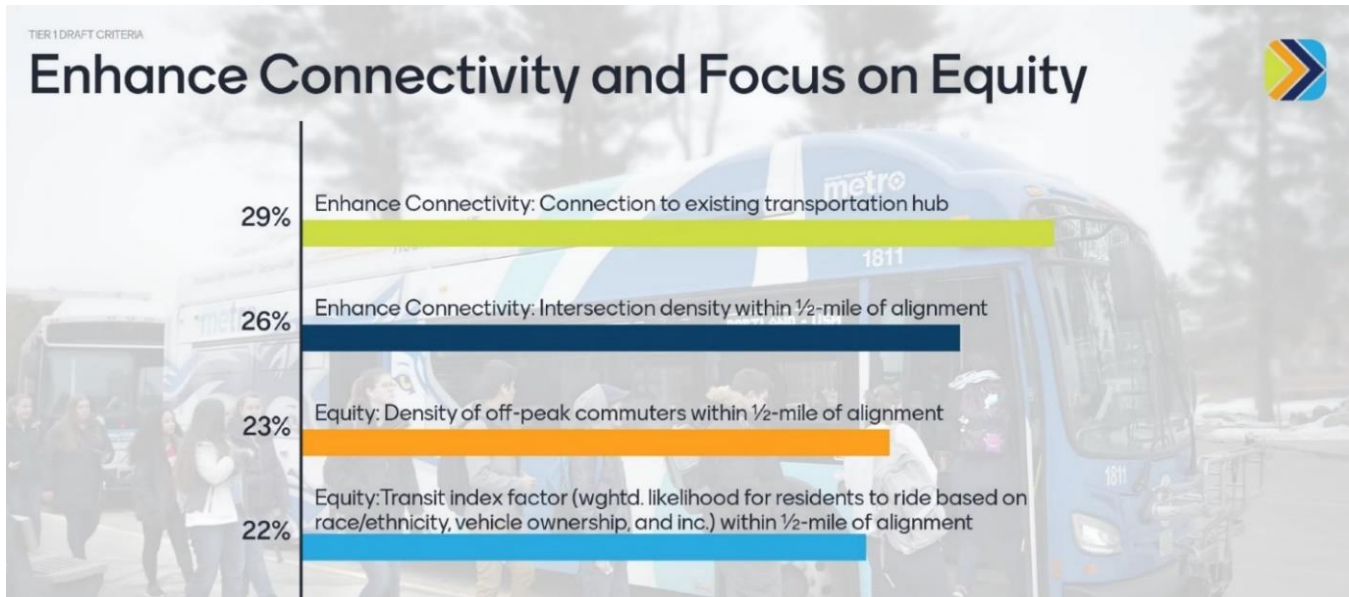




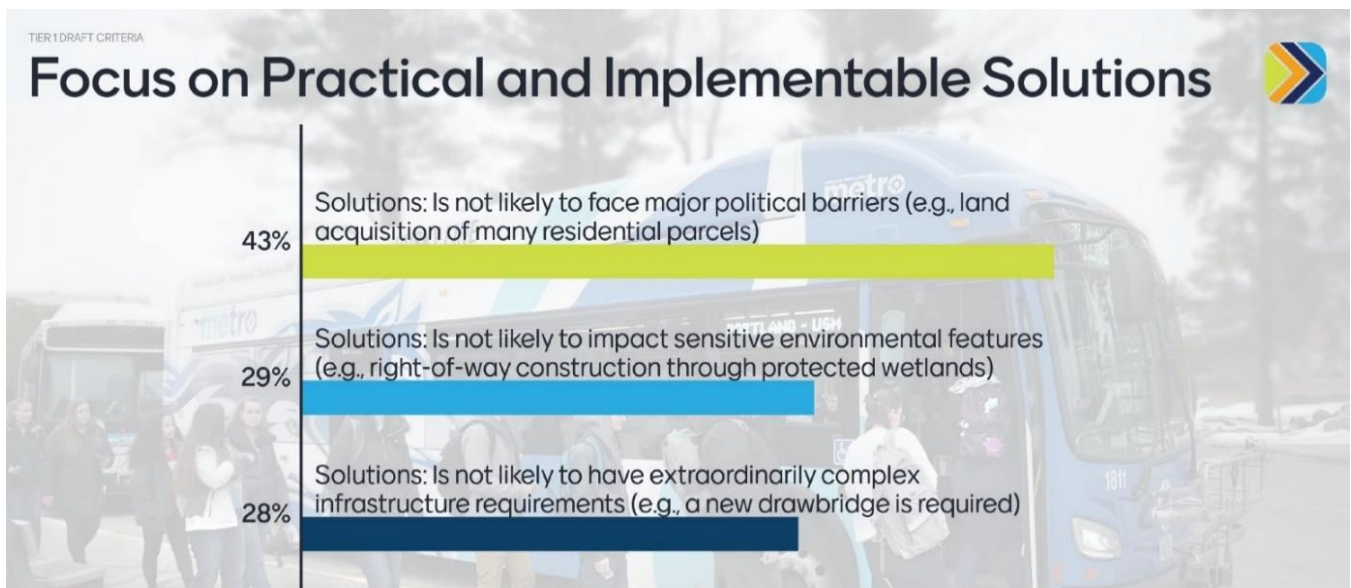
- Many parts of the corridor are low-density but 30-minute frequency seems low for rapid transit.
 - We hope to target areas with high transit demand, but many alignments run through a mix of areas with both high and low potential demand. 30-minute frequency is not the planned frequency for a rapid transit line (it would be higher); it is only being used as an evaluation criteria to help identify places with a minimum level of transit demand.



- How do you measure future transit demand within 1/2 mile?
 - We use a model of demographic factors and GPCOG's forecasts for population and employment in 2045.



- The 'Provide New Opportunities' and 'Focus on Practical and Implementable Solutions' goal areas were originally combined in the Menti slides, but PAG members pointed out that these two items seem unrelated and it was hard to rank priorities when they were combined. The team then separated them into two different Menti slides and repolled the group as shown below.
- PAG members also noted that not every goal area has same number of criteria, and wondered whether this would give higher weights to certain goal areas.
 - The team does not intend to weight the criteria, but wanted to understand if certain metrics make more of a difference to PAG members. The polling process was also a way get PAG members to consider different goals and understand how the criteria will be used. A goal area with more criteria will influence a section-level alignment's overall score more than a goal area with fewer criteria.



Next Steps

All segments that passed through the Step A screening will now undergo the Tier 1 evaluation. It is anticipated that a fourth PAG meeting will be held in about two months to share the results, as well as a short list of recommended alternatives for the final screening step.

The second round of public engagement will share the recommended short list of alternatives with the public later this winter.

Public Comment

No comments.