

# Task 2: Vision and Goals

*Technical Memorandum*

*Submitted to Greater Portland Council of Governments*

*October 2019*

## Table of Contents

TRANSIT TOMORROW VISION STATEMENT AND GOALS.....	1
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT .....	2
PREVIOUS REGIONAL PLANS.....	4
A VISION IN ACTION.....	6

## TRANSIT TOMORROW VISION STATEMENT AND GOALS

The people of Southern Maine want more and better public transportation. To understand how to prioritize limited funds to meet needs and desires of our residents and businesses, the Transit Tomorrow plan will be guided by a long-range vision for the Southern Maine region. To that end, the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) has undertaken an extensive process to solicit public input, engage stakeholders, document outcomes from prior plans, and review best practices from peer agencies. The results of this work provide a framework for developing a vision that is comprehensive, deliberate, and has broad stakeholder and public buy-in.

The findings from this information gathering effort can be found in later sections of this memorandum. Based on the findings, the following is a draft Vision Statement for review and comment by the Transit Tomorrow Project Advisory Committee (PAC):

**Our region's public transportation system is growing, and attracting more people with service that is easier, cheaper and faster than driving a car. Our region's agencies collaborate to create seamless, reliable transportation for a wide array of customers, including those who need a quick commute during rush hour, those living on the islands with no other travel option, and those with limited mobility options. Our communities support the long-term viability of public transportation by encouraging housing and job growth in places people already live and work. The public transportation in our region catalyzes economic development, reduces climate pollution, and enhances great places and public health.**

To accomplish this, we envision a public transportation system that does the following:

- 1. Supports Economic Development and Great Places:** Transportation and land use are inextricably linked. The region has made the preservation of natural places and rural areas a longstanding priority, with a stated preference of focusing new growth within already developed areas. New public transportation investments should be concentrated in the priority centers and corridors<sup>1</sup> to complement this regional commitment.
- 2. Enhances Environmental Quality and Addresses Climate Change:** Public transportation investments reduce greenhouse gas emissions by providing a viable alternative to driving and by deploying clean vehicles. The public transportation network should be resilient to extreme weather events and long-range climate stresses, and be prepared to serve the region in the event of an emergency.
- 3. Harnesses Technological Advances to Improve the Customer Experience:** The region's public transportation network should adopt technologies that hold the most promise to improve the customer experience, particularly those that create a more seamless travel environment. Multi-modal trip planner applications, electronic and mobile fare payment options, and regional fare payment systems are a few examples of such technology.
- 4. Expands Regional Collaboration:** Southern Maine has a rich transportation network of public transportation providers that can make navigation of the system – especially across multiple providers – challenging. Public Transportation providers should expand regional collaboration through centralized online information, multi-agency transit maps, and coordinated schedules that complement one another.

---

<sup>1</sup> As defined in *Destination 2040* and updated/confirmed as part of *Transit Tomorrow* municipal outreach.

- 5. Expands Access and Mobility Options:** Southern Maine's public transportation network offers a robust and more inclusive system that offers safe access to those who rely on public transportation while integrating their needs. There are opportunities to expand this system as innovations in mobility services offer means of increasing access for all users. The region should encourage existing transit providers to implement new mobility options and explore developing relationships with innovative mobility service providers to increase transit coverage in Southern Maine.

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Engagement with a diverse group of stakeholders has been the backbone of the Transit Tomorrow planning process. The outreach efforts, including feedback received, are described below.

### Project Advisory Committee

The Transit Tomorrow planning effort is guided by input from diverse community leaders in the region. The 26-member Project Advisory Committee (PAC) includes town planners, representatives from community organizations, riders, business leaders, and transit agency heads. Committee meetings have been held throughout the process and have included educational components and opportunities for guided feedback. Overall, members of the PAC are concerned with public health in the region, connecting transit with other modes to further boost alternative transportation, making regional transit more user-friendly, providing more frequent transit service with longer hours of operation, accessing additional state and local funding for transit, and leveraging transit to support more progressive land use.

### Transit Tomorrow Pop-Ups

PACTS stationed staff members at four heavily-trafficked transit stop locations in the region on June 12, 2019 including the Saco Train Station, the Mill Creek Transit Hub, the Maine Mall, Portland's Monument Square, and the Casco Bay Lines Terminal. Staff members explained the goals of the Transit Tomorrow plan and used guided activities to facilitate the gathering of relevant feedback from community members. Ideas and concerns included:

- Explore TOD potential near Saco Station
- Sprawl/development in the outer 'ring' of Portland
- Toll roads for increased revenue
- Intra-state commuter rail trips in Maine
- Improve Boston-Maine Commute
- Dedicated bus lanes
- Earlier/more train service northbound from Saco to Portland
- Better island-to-island connectivity, more ferry service for year-round residents
- Improve transit connections to and from the airport
- Planning for incoming climate refugees
- Reverse trend of shrinking labor pool
- Accessibility to transit services
- Increase parking at transit hubs, including South Portland

## Stakeholder Meetings

In addition to Project Advisory Committee meetings, GPCOG has sought input from local leaders in smaller stakeholder meetings focused on their roles in Southern Maine's transit future. Over the next few months, the project team will continue to meet with transit stakeholders, including municipal staff and officials throughout the region, business leaders, and local officials and advocates working on transportation and mobility issues. Meetings to date have included:

- **September 23, Casco Bay Lines Terminal:** Board members from the seven transit agencies gathered to discuss the regional vision for public transportation in the future including desired reputation, challenges, trade-offs, and necessary investments to achieve desired outcomes.
- **September 30, South Portland City Hall:** Community workshop was held to seek input of South Portland residents. Key themes of this meeting were regional connections, transportation for employment, and family-friendly public transportation options.
- **October 1, 2019 Portland Peninsula Route Redevelopment Public Meeting:** GPCOG staff attended the open house style public meeting to discuss and collect feedback for the development of a regional vision for public transportation.
- **October 22, PACTS Transit Committee Workshop:** Members of the PACTS Transit Committee met and discussed upcoming capital projects of regional significance. This allowed the Transit Tomorrow project team to better plan and account for infrastructure changes that are underway.
- **Ongoing municipal meetings:** GPCOG staff is meeting with municipal staff and officials across Southern Maine to understand land use trends, growth areas and projected growth areas, and to confirm PACTS corridors and centers by community. GPCOG staff is also updating each municipality on the Transit Tomorrow project.

## Survey Results

In the effort to maximize public input in this long-range public transportation planning effort, an online survey was hosted on GPCOG's website from July 8, 2019 through August 27, 2019 and advertised throughout the region. The survey received 823 responses. Most respondents were not transit-dependent with only 10.7% using transit daily and 8.2% weekly—49.7% indicated that they only used it occasionally. Another concern is that “bus” did not distinguish between local bus service and the Concord Coach intercity bus service – it is possible that some or even most respondents indicating occasional use of the bus were referring to the Concord Coach.

The survey was structured to ask respondents to rank various priorities in the transit system, assigning actual “money” to each priority. Results of that exercise are in Figure 1. In addition to structured prioritization exercises, the survey design also provided the opportunity for respondents to share feedback in open-ended comments. The most common theme in the comments received was the desire for an increased range of service, either through increased coverage area or number of stops available. Accessibility, service frequency and multi-modal integration were also mentioned by many respondents.

### Budget Allocation Results

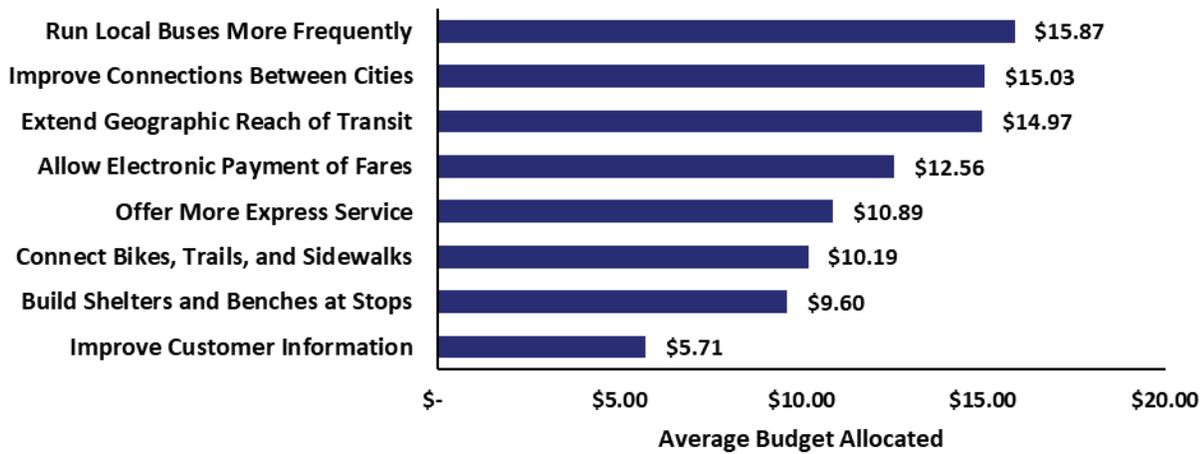


Figure 1. Results from one of the survey’s prioritization exercises

In the general comments section, while a few respondents referenced the specific service providers (Metro, South Portland Bus Service, etc.), one finding from the survey was that many spoke in a global sense about “the bus.” This suggests that most residents, especially those who use transit seldom or not at all, see the system as unified even though it has multiple service providers with different service types, funding streams, rider bases, and governance structures. While the survey itself was nuanced, this lack of detail on the part of the respondents could have made it difficult for them to provide clear input into future goals.

## PREVIOUS REGIONAL PLANS

Previously completed studies and plans have identified multiple priorities for Greater Portland that should be incorporated into the vision for the region. These plans have engaged numerous stakeholders including municipal staff, transportation professionals, elected officials, nonprofit agencies, and business leaders, in addition to the public at large. These documents provide a foundation for creating a regional vision for public transportation. Two significant recent plans are **Destination 2040** and **Moving Southern Maine Forward**. For more information, the task one memorandum, *Task 1: Existing Conditions*, provides a comprehensive overview of findings and recommendations from prior studies.

### Destination 2040

*Destination 2040* is the Long Range Transportation Plan for the greater Portland area. It reviews key trends impacting the region, identifies strategic priorities for PACTS, and lists major projects that will impact the region over the next two decades. Importantly, the plan also articulates a transportation vision for southern Maine;

The vision in *Destination 2040* is:

The *Destination 2040* vision for the PACTS regional transportation system is to provide a safe, fully developed, and well-maintained multimodal means of travel for all people and goods as efficiently and cost effectively as possible. The transportation system will be coordinated with land-use decisions promoting compact livable development that preserves community character while retaining open and natural spaces, which enhance the natural and human environments.

The plan goes on to outline six goals for the regional transportation system. They are:

1. Maintain a Regional Focus
2. Support Economic Development
3. Prioritize Mobility, Safety & Accessibility
4. Incorporate Energy Conservation
5. Integrate Land Use
6. Protect Environmental Quality

The plan goes on to describe in greater detail how the future transportation system should support these six goals. Taken together, this plan paints a coherent picture for priorities that should be incorporated into the Transit Tomorrow vision:

### **Safety, Mobility, Accessibility**

The public transportation system should prioritize the health and well-being of the region's residents, regardless of how they travel. In the case of public transportation, pedestrian safety is an essential consideration to fulfill this portion of the vision. This should include goals such as developing a fully-accessible sidewalk system around transit hubs and corridors, building pedestrian-friendly crossings to serve bus stops, and managing design speeds for roadways that host bus routes.

### **Economic Development and Open Space Conservation**

There is a strong connection in the plan between transportation and land use. The region has expressed a preference for directing new development to existing urban centers and preserving farmland, open space, and the rural character of outlying communities. Public transit can complement that strategy by focusing service and investments, such as increased bus frequency or expanded hours of service, in those existing areas of development.

### **Energy Conservation and Environmental Quality**

Public transportation should play a role in enhancing the energy efficiency of the transportation system while also improving local environmental quality of those areas where it operates. This suggests two things: First, transit should be an appealing, feasible alternative to driving in those priority centers and corridors identified by the region. Shifting drivers into buses, trains, and other shared rides is a primary way to improve the energy efficiency of the region's transportation system and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Second, transit infrastructure should minimize local pollution through implementation of all electric or hybrid electric buses, high-efficiency bus wash systems, and solid waste reduction (bus schedule printing reduction strategies, e.g.).

### **Regional Focus**

Emphasizing the regional aspect of the transportation system is the perfect role for the regional planning agency, and a priority articulated in the plan. Because of the multi-actor nature of the public transportation system, this aspect of the vision requires coordination between the seven public transportation providers, the Maine Department of Transportation, municipalities, and the general public.

## **Moving Southern Maine Forward**

The short-term regional transit plan, *Moving Southern Maine Forward*, provides a deeper look at regional trends impacting transit and included the results from a public survey regarding travel habits and perceptions of public transportation. The plan identified outcomes and performance measures for achieving the vision laid out in *Destination 2040*, and recommendations for achieving them.

Outcomes identified in *Moving Southern Maine Forward* are:

- Increase regional ridership
- Decrease travel time
- Optimize the return on the investment in transit
- Reduce emissions
- Improve safety
- Improve connectivity

These outcomes should inform the long-range public transportation vision, rooting it in specific, tangible outcomes. These outcomes should also filter down to performance measures that allow transit operators and relevant regional actors to gauge the effectiveness of the public transportation system.

## Themes Identified in Previous Plans

In addition to *Destination 2040* and *Moving Southern Maine Forward*, there have been numerous comprehensive and master plans produced over the years that have bearing on the long-range public transportation vision. An overview of these plans is available in *Task 1: Existing Conditions*. Briefly, these plans had the following recommendations:

1. Preserve open space and focus growth in already developed areas
2. Explore methods, including new taxes, to increase funding for transit
3. Pilot new technologies to improve the customer experience
4. Expand transit service
5. Design roadways to accommodate all modes (Complete Streets)

There were also a series of other recommendations that did not fit into a specific category or theme, dealing with issues as wide ranging as transit asset management, housing affordability, and alternative energy infrastructure.

## A VISION IN ACTION

The vision laid out in this document will act as the guiding foundation for transit investments over the next thirty years. The extensive outreach undertaken to both the public and agency stakeholders has provided the basis for this vision and provided reassurance that a bold pro-transit vision for the future of Southern Maine is the proper direction for the region.

The key aspects of this vision are that transit should support economic development and Great Places; enhance environmental quality and address climate change; harness technological advances to improve the customer experience; expand regional collaboration; and expand access and mobility options.

Through continued collaboration, regional meetings, and ongoing public involvement, PACTS and its transit agency members should align their capital and operating programs to support this shared regional vision. Together, the key actors in Southern Maine can create a transit system that is a first choice among residents as the fastest, cheapest, and easiest way to travel.