

Transit Together

Project Advisory Group (PAG)

April 6, 2022
1:00–2:30 p.m.
Meeting Notes

Attendees: Chad Heid (BSOOB); Hank Berg, Jonathan Greven (CBITD); Becky Johnson, Cheryl Oldfield (GPCOG CTLs); Kevin Sutherland (Move to ME), Al Green (MaineHealth); Rebecca Grover (Maine Turnpike); Greg Jordan, Mike Tremblay, Hope Cahan (METRO); Patricia Quinn, William Gayle (NNEPRA); Nell Donaldson (PACTS RTAC/City of Portland), Jack De Beradinis, Don Libby, John Grew (RTP); Quincy Hentzel (Portland C of C), Christie Gaydos (Portland Housing Authority) Donna Tippet (SPBS), Stephanie Carver (SMPDC), Liz Cotter Schlax (United Way), Tom Reinaeur (YCCAC), Kristina Egan, Ericka Amador (GPCOG), Kenneth Capron

Project Team in Attendance: Amy Pettine, Joe Poirier, Geoff Slater, Ian Kolesinskas (Nelson\Nygaard), Anne Galbraith (ASG Planning), Andrew Clark, Chris Chop (GPCOG)

1. Project Update

Amy Pettine gave an update on the study.

- The Market Analysis, Existing Service Report, and route profiles are posted on the Transit Together website. Please help us publicize the availability of these documents and encourage people to comment on how services are performing, as well as offer ideas for improvement.
- In addition to the ‘rolling public comments’ accepted through the website, we also held a public meeting and met with GPCOG Community Transportation Leaders (CTLs). We hope to meet with the CTL group again as they offer good perspective on current transit network challenges.
- Next steps will include an agency workshop which will incorporate discussions on microtransit. Service scenarios will be brought to the public in early summer, followed by draft recommendations in the early fall.
- Finally, as a reminder, public priorities and Transit Tomorrow regional goals guide our work.

2. State of Regional Transit Key Findings

Joe Poirier reviewed the key findings from Market Analysis and Existing Conditions reports. Most key findings have already been shared with the PAG and include:

- The region includes areas with high transit demand, but much of the area has low demand
- There are network gaps and design challenges that make service less direct/attractive
- There is an overall lack of service frequency and limited Sunday span of service

- Information can be difficult to find and understand and is not coordinated across the region. There are also many different brands which can be confusing for riders.
- Bus stops offer inconsistent features and information, and most lack any amenities.

3. Opportunities

Geoff Slater presented seven key opportunity areas the consultant team sees potential for improvement:

- Providing more frequent service
- Increasing focus on high-demand areas
- Making service faster/reducing travel times
- Making service easier to use and understand/more seamless
- Improving network design and connections
- Improving transit stops
- Planning together/working together

4. Discussion

Smaller breakout rooms were used to encourage comment on the opportunity areas. PAG members were divided into two groups, each of which spent 10 to 15 minutes in each breakout room. In these breakout rooms, PAG members were asked which key opportunities are most important to them, which are less important, and if anything was missed.

Breakout Room 1: Frequency, Demand, and Faster Service

- **Frequency and Travel Times:** Fast and frequent is cornerstone of transit. Transit has to compete with single-occupant vehicles.
- Similar frequencies across routes and agencies can reduce time spent waiting for transfers.
- Making service faster on certain congested corridors is important.
- Offering higher frequency service may require significant resources. Other strategies should also be considered to make service more attractive (e.g. signal priority, dedicated lanes, etc.).
- **Focusing on High-Demand Areas:** High-demand areas should be prioritized, also making service faster and easier to understand, and improving network design.
- Route-level priority should be clearly determined. Not all routes should have the same level of service if they're serving areas with varying levels of demand.
- Sunday service is a lower priority in some areas, due to less demand.
- **Lifeline service:** Although it is good to focus on high-demand areas, low-demand areas will continue to have residents in need of transportation. Infrequent service may be better than no service for people without vehicles, but more efficient models for service delivery need to be considered.
- One approach is to start to improve service by thinking about the worst-case transit riding scenario, such as an older person waiting for the bus on cold and windy day.
- Microtransit could be valuable but fixed routes may be more dependable.

- **Make Transit Easier:** Service should be easy to use and understand, and the network should better facilitate regionwide travel for all potential travelers.
- More predictable service is needed. Reliability and on-time performance should be considered.
- **Using Data:** The market segments/categories for transit should be further explored to determine how the ideas in each 'key opportunity' suit different markets.
- It would be good to understand the concrete trade-offs with these choices. We need good data on benefits and drawbacks, such as a model of projected ridership changes.

Breakout Room 2: Making Travel More Seamless, Redesigning the Network, Improving Bus Stops, and Working Together

- **Working Together:** Almost all participants in this room agreed that Working Together must come first as the top priority. Working Together is a top priority to achieve consistency across the region (in bus stops, service standards, etc.). We need unifying standards based on route type, corridor characteristics, etc.
- To achieve buy-in, everyone must understand the standards upon which decisions are based, as well as the tradeoffs. Must include cost-benefit analyses in decision-making. There must be clear goals, performance standards and/or other metrics used to direct investments across the region.
- Different entities' roles (the transit agencies, the MPO, stakeholders) should be clearly defined.
- **Redesigning the Network:** Transit Together is about advancing tangible improvements for the rider. Need to redesign bus network to better serve the rider is the key tangible priority.
- **Making Transit More Seamless:** Improving materials, websites, and GTFS are top priorities for making transit more seamless.
- Network connections should facilitate regionwide travel.
- Regional branding has been considered in the past in response to the public's desire for a more seamless network. There is much pride in individual agency brands and advancing this goal must consider the unique markets and needs of each agency.
- Regional fare payment may also be a challenge given the costs associated with transitioning to a new system, as well as different agency markets and fare policies.
- **Bus Stops:** Bus stops should be of consistent quality across the region. Improving stops has long been discussed and this continues to be an important need.
- **Multimodal Considerations:** Recommendations specific to particular modes should be highlighted as such (e.g., bus stop recommendations are not relevant to Casco Bay Lines or the Downeaster).

5. Breakout Room Recap

After breakout rooms, the group reconvened. Key takeaways and comments were recapped as follows:

- Focusing on better frequency across the region was the central priority in Breakout Room#1, with participants tying other priorities back to frequency.
- Reliability and predictability improvements are also needed to make transfers easier.

- The participants agreed that focusing on higher-density areas makes sense while still providing resources for lower-demand areas where transit is a more of a lifeline service.
- Working Together emerged as a priority, but it must be focused on advancing tangible improvements based on consistent, equitable standards across the region. High-ranked priorities for action included improving information, materials and bus stops, along with network design.
- Creating a seamless system was an important idea for participants.
- Concerns about the challenges of regional branding and universal fare collection across providers with different missions, markets, etc.

6. Scenarios

The consultant team introduced the concept of scenarios. Scenarios are a way to bundle changes to help the public understand the range of possible improvement. The public won't be asked to select a specific scenario, but rather to identify the elements that appeal to them within each scenario. The team will use this input to put together a final, recommended scenario.

Draft scenarios will be designed with cost-neutral impact. Desired improvements that do not fit within a cost-neutral scenario will be prioritized in the event additional funding becomes available.

The team will use the priorities we heard today to draft rough scenarios and will refine these with the seven transit providers. Proposed scenarios will be brought back to the PAG before being shared with the public for comment.

7. Public Comment

Kenneth Capron: This study should focus on specific improvements, not planning together. Transit should go to where the demand is (e.g., meet large business shift changes, serve the elderly). Mr. Capron also encouraged the team to develop a revenue-positive solution, not a cost-neutral solution.

8. Next Steps

Amy Pettine asked PAG members to encourage the public and their constituents to visit the Transit Together website and comment on the route profiles and other posted materials. Next steps for the study team are to work with the transit providers to draft alternative scenarios.

The next PAG meeting is anticipated for June.