

Public Meeting #1 Summary

Virtual meeting hosted on the Zoom platform, February 17, 2022, 5:30 to 7:00 pm

(Attendee list attached.)

Andrew Clark, Project Manager for GPCOG, introduced the project and the Nelson\Nygaard consulting team. The team gave an overview of the purpose and goals of the Transit Together study and described the results of a Transit Market Analysis and Existing Conditions Report.

Key findings presented include:

- Public priorities from previous GPCOG studies have identified faster, more frequent transit service as the top public priorities.
- Transit demand is largely based on population and employment density. Densities are highest in Portland, Westbrook, South Portland, Biddeford, and Saco; elsewhere, the greater Portland region is low density.
- Ridership is highest in the locations above, and also has strong seasonal fluctuations for several providers.
- Most transit routes in the region operate at relatively low frequency. There is one BSOOB Transit route operating with somewhat consistent headways of less than 30 minutes¹ and some of other corridors (e.g., Brighton Avenue and Main Street in Portland and Westbrook) that have overlapping service producing headways of less than 30 minutes on certain segments. Other routes provide frequencies between 30 and 60 minutes, but over half of all fixed transit routes in the region operate at frequencies of less than 60 minutes.
- The overall spans of service offered are generally good, starting early in the morning and ending late in the evening, except for Sunday
- Fixed bus routes that serve primary arterials/corridors have relatively high ridership and productivity. Fixed bus routes that are designed to cover larger areas produce limited ridership and are less successful.

The Transit Together study aims to improve the design and effectiveness of existing services and the team has prepared a "Route Profile" or in-depth analysis of each fixed transit route in the area. These Route Profiles will be posted to the study website (TransitTogether.org) for public review. A sample Route Profile was shared, including the list of potential ideas for service improvement that will be included for each route. The public is encouraged to read these Route Profiles on the website and provide feedback.

The study also aims to consider new service models and improve regional coordination. The public was asked to share their thoughts on seven initial coordination opportunities that have been identified so far:

- More transit options in low-density areas
- Improved regional connections
- Service aimed at the tourism market
- Improved customer information
- Better stops, shelters, and signage

¹ The downtown Biddeford circulator pattern on BSOOB Transit Route 54.

- Regional branding
- Coordinated fare payment

Once public feedback is received on the Route Profiles and other study documents posted on the website, the team will prepare alternative network investment scenarios. These are essentially a way to present various improvement ideas to the public. Public outreach to gain feedback on these ideas is anticipated for late spring/early summer.

Summary of Public Comments and Discussion

Attendees were encouraged to ask questions or to provide comments on the material presented. These comments are organized by topic below.

Transit Service Frequency

- If transit arrives predictably and frequently, people could use it without needing to consult a schedule. This would make transit much more attractive (e.g., 15-minute headways).
- In terms of in-town travel in Portland, 30-minute frequency on many routes makes it quicker to walk than take the bus. This is definitely a barrier to getting people out of cars.
- Low transit usage has less to do with the convenience of autos than the fact transit is not very accessible/convenient.

Span of Service

- Limited evening/holiday hours and limited Sunday service make it difficult to live without a car.

Key Destinations

- Transit to/from major employers can be challenging, especially if a rider needs to transfer between different providers and schedules are not aligned with shift times. For example, transferring between the Purple/Zoom and the Orange/Black routes to access Southern Maine Health Care hospital in Biddeford.
- Destinations suggested as needing new or improved transit service:
 - Beaches and children's museum.
 - North Deering
 - Pleasant Mountain/Shawnee Peak, lakes in the summer
 - Maine Med Campus Drive (Route 1)
 - Shawnee Peak
 - Many in the region work at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard or Bath Iron Works.

Transit Demand/Increasing Ridership

- There is an opportunity to capture latent demand (or more riders) by offering well designed transit and transit-oriented development.
- There is also an opportunity to tap new transit demand with all the new arrivals to Greater Portland.
 - The region should market these new arrivals and encourage them to use transit before their travel patterns are ingrained.
- Transit-oriented development could help capture this latent demand and new riders.

- The Denver/Boulder, CO area gives free passes to large numbers of students and employees, making transit something everyone uses. They also run buses from all over the region to big events like professional sports games.
 - MaineHealth is already doing this; employees and volunteers can ride for free with a badge.
- Work with employers to see how to incentivize transit over driving. This reduces employer costs for parking lots.
- Free parking incentivizes driving.
- Transit should be well publicized and incentivized through employers.

Bus Stops and Passenger Facilities

- There should be signage to prevent smoking/vaping in stops.
- There is only one bus stop in downtown Gorham, could use more.
- Many stops on the Biddeford to Portland route along US 1 are not very visible.
 - The Director of BSOOB Transit noted that improving stop signage on the Biddeford to Portland route is a high priority for his agency.
- Being a senior, waiting for a bus in the rain and snow needs to change.
- Add more park-and-ride areas where parking is easy and there are transit stops.

Regional Connections/Transfers

- The Downeaster offers free transfers to METRO buses in its café car, but riders must pay both bus and train fares when transferring from METRO to the train.
- Rail/bus transfers are challenging because schedules are not aligned.
- Are people not riding coverage-based service because they don't want to or because of other attributes of the service (frequency, stops, etc.)?
 - Coverage-based service is typically less direct and slower than corridor service. This makes these routes less attractive.
- Travel for people without access to a car can be difficult and rideshare services may be unavailable or too expensive.

Service Models in Low-Density Areas

- Consider pick up/drop offs in any location on low-density area (e.g., expanded deviated fixed-route service along the largely rural Lakes Region Explorer).

Regional Coordination

- Coordinate information on stop locations between providers so riders can more easily understand it
- Given the Portland area has a significantly larger number of transit systems than most other areas of similar size, some participants expressed interest in agency consolidation.
- Past studies have highlighted and explored the potential for agency consolidation as well as other avenues for coordination. This study should highlight the challenges inherent to increased coordination but recognize that the public continues to have a desire for improved regional transit. Funding priorities and other incentives might be explored to encourage greater coordination.

Public Outreach/Capturing Rider Input

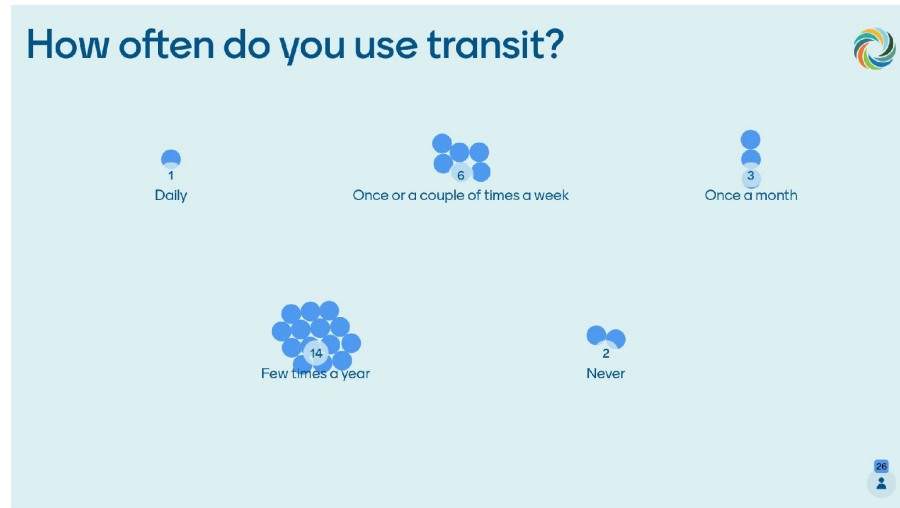
- The project should reach out directly to transit customers/riders.
- Attendees asked for information that service providers, non-profits, and governments entities could help distribute 'out on the street,' and to their web sites and distribution lists.
- Attendees cautioned against focus only on who current riders, which could limit the ability to generate new riders.
 - Suggest polling workers at large employers to see where they are coming from and what would make transit an option for them.
 - Survey current non-riders, to learn what might make them become riders.
 - Poll people pulling into parking garages in downtown Portland to learn where they come from and if they are aware of available transit.

Other

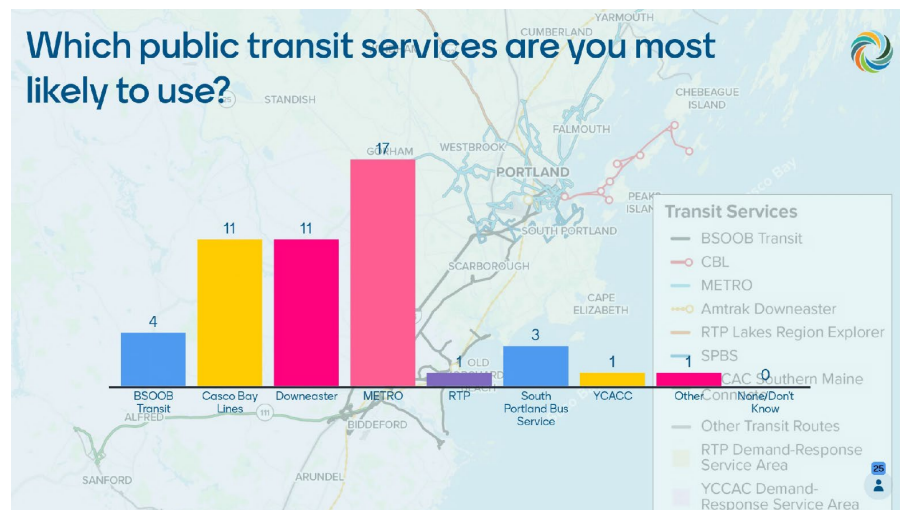
- Make sure transit vehicles are bike friendly and service connects to trailheads.

Poll Results

Using an on-line polling service, attendees were asked a series of questions during the presentation. Given the relatively low number of meeting attendees, these results were used primarily to better understand the perspective of these attendees, rather than transit riders at large. However, the responses generally complement public feedback received through past planning efforts.

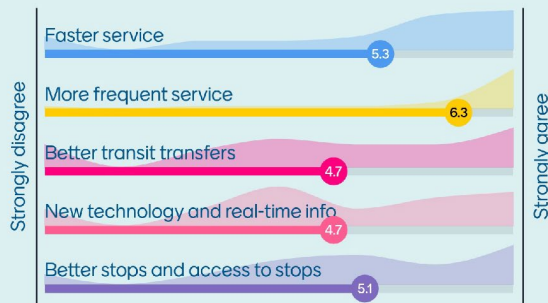


Most attendees use transit a few times per year. Only seven attendees use transit once a week or more.



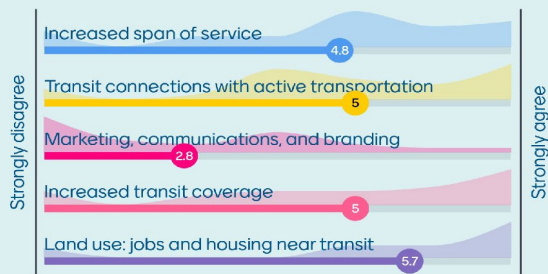
Attendees were most likely to travel on METRO buses, the Downeaster, or Casco Bay Lines.

Do you agree with these priorities for improving transit service in the Greater Portland region?



The need for faster, more frequent service has been voiced by the public as part of past studies.

Do you agree with these priorities for improving transit service in the Greater Portland region?



Attendees agreed, but also highlight several other desired improvements.

Are there places in the Greater Portland region you would like to go to via transit that are not well served today?



Better transit connections to Scarborough, Cape Elizabeth, the Jetport, Biddeford Crossing, and Falmouth, as well as other destinations, were suggested by meeting attendees.

Attendees

Project Team

Andrew Clark, GPCOG
Kristina Egan, GPCOG
Ericka Amador, GPCOG
Amy Pettine, Nelson\Nygaard
Joseph Poirier, Nelson\Nygaard
Ian Kolesinskas, Nelson\Nygaard
Geoff Slater, Nelson\Nygaard
Anne Galbraith, ASGPlanning

Advisory Group and Agency Representatives

James Bennett, PACTS Policy Board
Hank Berg, Casco Bay Lines
Hope Cahan, METRO Board/Falmouth
Jonathan Greven, Casco Bay Lines
John Grew, RTP Board
Rebecca Grover, Maine Turnpike Authority
Chad Heid, BSOOB Transit
Greg Jordan, METRO
Don Libby, Regional Transportation Program
Ryan Neale, MaineDOT
Cheryl Oldfield, Community Transportation Leader
Rick Sargent, South Portland Bus Service
Donna Tippet, South Portland Bus Service
Michael Tremblay, METRO

Attendees

Craig Pendleton (BSOOBTransit)
Kenneth Capron
Emily LaRoche
John Clark
Roger Beeley
Lisa Joy
Jeff Levine
Eben Sweetser
Maddie Jensen
Teagan Betori
Jay Chace

Sara Devlin
Portia Hirschman
Karin Shupe
Izaak Onos
Virginia Wilder Cross
Tom Meyers
Eric Freeman
Haley
Allen Armstrong
Derek Pelletier
Erin Brown

Christie Gaydos
Patricia Stasinowsky
Madelene Cyr
Liz Trice
Shelby McDonnell
Brad Hanscom
Brian Eng
Gary Spencer

+ 1 unnamed participant