

Transit Together

Project Advisory Group (PAG)

December 8, 2021

1:00–2:30 pm

Meeting Notes

Attendees: Chad Heid (BSOOB), Hank Berg and Jonathan Greven (CBITD), Kevin Sutherland (Move to ME), Rob Liscord (Policy Advocate), Al Green (MaineHealth), Rebecca Grover (Maine Turnpike), Ryan Neale (MaineDOT), Ed Knutson (METRO/RTP), Greg Jordan, Mike Trembly and Hope Cahan (METRO), Patricia Quinn (NNEPRA), Jim Bennet (PACTS Policy Board/Biddeford), Nell Donaldson (PACTS RTAC/City of Portland), Quincy Hentzel (Portland C of C), Cristie Gaydos (Portland Housing Authority) Donna Tippet (SPBS), Stephanie Carver (SMPDC), Liz Cotter Schlax (United Way), Tom Reinaeur (YCCAC)

Project Team in Attendance: Amy Pettine (NN), Joe Poirier (NN), Dan Berez (NN), Anne Galbraith (ASG), Andrew Clark (GPCOG), Chris Chop (GPCOG)

Project Update

Amy Pettine (Nelson\Nygaard) welcomed new attendees and reminded the group that public priorities are largely driving study work. She indicated much of the baseline work on existing conditions has been completed and will be presented today.

Market Analysis

Joe Poirier (Nelson\Nygaard) gave an overview of the methods and key findings of the recently completed Market Analysis. The objective of this work was to understand the underlying demand for transit in the region, where different markets are located and where there may be gaps in service or underserved markets. Key findings include:

- Planned developments may impact near-term transit needs, with notable locations including Commercial Street, Riverside Street, and the Rock Row development in Portland.
- While the Peninsula has the greatest concentration of population and employment, there are also considerable commute flows between adjacent suburbs, as well as into Biddeford/Saco.
- Several transit gaps have been identified based on an imbalance between the number of jobs available and transit access. These include much of Biddeford, Saco, and Old Orchard Beach; parts of Westbrook, South Portland, and the East Deering neighborhood of Portland; and connections to Sanford and other small outlying urban centers.

Discussion:

- Planned Developments: Additional developments and activity centers were noted:
 - Al Green (MaineHealth) offered to help map more healthcare hubs
 - Donna Tippet (SPBS) mentioned Cushing's Point and the permitted Scarborough Downs project on Route 1, and suggested the team reach out to the S. Portland Planning Dept.

- Jim Bennett (PACTS/Biddeford) asked whether predicted future densities were considered. He noted that 40% of Biddeford's mill space remains available for development and, given recent trends, should be reflected in some way.
- Joe Poirier said only planned/approved developments were mapped at this time. Amy Pettine added that the study is focusing on near-term improvements and current market demand, but the team will think about how to better reflect anticipated future growth.
- Demographics, Density and Transit Markets:
 - Jim Bennett suggested the analysis should reflect: 1) changing demographics in the Biddeford/Saco area (now the youngest area in the state); 2) the needs of BIPoC populations; 3) gaps based on non-work trips.
 - Joe Poirier said the full report includes analysis of minority populations, recent immigrants and other socio-economic factors that affect transit demand. He agreed that the analysis based on five-year ACS estimates from 2019 may be conservative in terms of recent growth. 2019 one-year estimates may be less conservative.
 - Amy Pettine noted that equity is an important consideration for the study.
 - Hank Berg (CBITD) said the Casco Bay Islands are a unique market since transit is a lifeline for residents.
- Transit Gaps:
 - In response to a question, Joe indicated the full Market Analysis also identifies gaps based on access to health care, grocery stores, etc. Dan Berez (Nelson\Nygaard) noted the analysis also looks the needs of low-density areas.
 - Greg Jordan (METRO) asked why the team identified a gap in Westbrook's Frenchtown neighborhood, since METRO serves this area. Joe explained that this is likely because residents of the area must walk across the river to downtown Westbrook to access some of the service in the area.
 - Donna Tippett requested a copy of the assumptions. These will be in the final report which will soon be posted on the new website.

Existing Conditions

Joe Poirier gave an overview of work performed to date on Existing Conditions. This work is still being finalized and some data is still outstanding, but key findings to date include:

- The amount of fixed-route service provided and ridership have grown, but overall productivity (riders per revenue hour) has declined for all but two agencies (BSOOb and CBITD). For the two demand-response providers, the amount of service provided has declined (due largely to changes in the delivery of non-emergency medical transportation) but productivity has remained fairly constant.
- The highest ridership corridors outside the Peninsula are on Forest Avenue in Portland, Brighton Avenue/Main Street between Portland and Westbrook, and along Washington Ave./Stevens Ave.
- There is a fair amount of transit service that provides coverage in lower density/lower ridership corridors.
- Ridership has seasonal fluctuations. BSOObT and CBITD have large summertime spikes, and METRO and SPBS experience stronger spring/fall shoulder seasons.
- Key intermodal terminals are spread out in Portland and connections are challenging.

Discussion:

- Patricia Quinn (NNEPRA) asked whether tourism markets are being considered, given the seasonality of ridership that was reflected. Greg Jordan agreed this market should be explored. Joe said the seasonality of ridership points to the need to consider how to serve these markets.
- Corridors
 - Rob Liscord (Policy Advocate) suggested there may a strong corridor from the Maine Mall into South Portland and its importance could increase with planned residential development around the mall. He also suggested looking at travel time between key destinations, which likely vary greatly.
 - Hank Berg noted that the Casco Bay ferry system should be a key corridor as it provides a lifeline to residents on the islands.
 - Greg Jordan indicated he agreed the corridors highlighted have high ridership, but was surprised the Route 1 corridor north of Portland was not included. Jim Bennett asked about the Route 1 corridor south of Portland, with Donna Tippettt noting key Scarborough destinations along the corridor (Scarborough Downs and Maine Medical).
 - Joe said the corridor north of Portland shows strong commute flows, but currently has relatively lower ridership. Given the strength of the Biddeford/Saco market, the corridor to the south of Portland appears to have more transit potential.
 - In response to comments from Chad Heid (BSOOBT) and Tom Reinauer (YCCAC), Joe said the Route 1/111 corridor is the strongest in the BSOOBT region but has lower ridership than the Portland corridors.
- Productivity
 - Chad Heid asked that the graphs note that gaps in data affect the results. Patricia Quinn cautioned that certain metrics don't apply to rail in the same manner and suggested that unique providers (e.g., rail and ferry) be evaluated separately.
 - Greg Jordan said declining productivity is in part due to a major service expansion introduced just prior to the pandemic, so ridership levels did not have time to mature. Donna Tippettt noted a similar impact with the timing of SPBS's introduction of Saturday evening service on Route 21.
 - Patricia Quinn said drops in ridership may not be due to fear of COVID-19, but that many destinations are closed due to the pandemic.

Microtransit

Dan Berez explained the scope and methods proposed for the upcoming microtransit task. The overarching objective will be to identify specific travel challenges or needs and to appropriately match them with potential new service models or use cases.

- Stephanie Carver (SMPDC) shared that her agency is working with YCCAC and MaineDOT to design a potential microtransit service to connect workers from Sanford and surrounding areas to the Kittery and Portsmouth shipyards.
- Greg Jordan shared that METRO is working with the Town of Falmouth on a pilot microtransit service.

Public Outreach

The [Transit Together website](#) will be transitioned to serve as a study webpage later this week and will serve as a repository for study documents. Anne Galbraith (ASG Planning) gave an overview of upcoming public engagement, which will use public input received during recent GPCOG studies as a starting point and will focus around one virtual meeting. The objective will be to introduce the study and the website as a resource for materials. The study team will pursue some of the many ideas suggested by the PAG at the last meeting to reach study area populations who are reliant on transit or who live in underserved areas.

Surveys and greater interaction with the public on proposed improvement ideas will occur in Round 2 of engagement.

Next Steps

Amy Pettine said next steps for the team are to:

- Finalize the Market Analysis and Existing Conditions reports
- Conduct public outreach in early 2022
- Prepare route profiles for each existing transit route to assess how riders use existing routes, identify factors that influence performance, and identify key ridership generators. The team will use this information to propose ideas for near-term network improvements.
- Conduct the microtransit analysis
- Identify opportunities and priorities for improving coordination and making investments in more seamless transit across the region

The PAG will be notified as reports become available on the website and Amy encouraged the PAG to submit comments. In response to a question, Amy confirmed all route evaluations will be shared with individual providers prior to public distribution.

The next PAG meeting is anticipated for February.