



Transit Together Study

# State of Regional Transit Part 3: Regional Service Delivery and Coordination

November 2022

**GPCOG**  
GREATER PORTLAND  
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

The Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) is the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for Maine's Greater Portland urbanized area. PACTS coordinates transportation-planning and -investment decisions with the State of Maine, 18 member municipalities, and regional transportation providers. This includes seven transit agencies that receive federal transit funding.

As part of the federally mandated transportation planning process, PACTS and the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) regularly update regional plans and set priorities for transportation investments in the Greater Portland region. Because fiscal resources are limited, the region makes difficult choices about how and where to make investments to best improve and enhance public transit.

Strategies to make service more seamless for transit riders and improve the efficiency of providing that service have been discussed since the 1990s. When adopting the region's most recent long-range transit plan, *Transit Tomorrow*, the PACTS Policy Board continued to stress the need for collaboration, and authorized funding for a study, *Transit Together*, to:

*"...make the best use of limited resources, improve efficiency, and create a cohesive and unified system for all users of public transportation..."*

## THE TRANSIT TOGETHER STUDY

*Transit Tomorrow*, the 30-year strategic transit plan for the region, specifically recommended advancing a separate *Transit Together* study to advance the regional vision, improve transit for riders, and create a more seamless regional system.

Specific regional goals include:

- Making transit **easier** for riders
- Creating **frequent** connections
- Investing in **rapid** transit
- Creating **transit-friendly places**



This plan will identify opportunities for increased coordination and integration in the region's transit network. This *Transit Together* study is now looking to modify the transit network to be more easily understood and used by riders, and to increase coordination and integration to help improve region-wide mobility. This Regional Service Delivery and Coordination report is one of three parts of the initial study deliverable: the *State of Regional Transit* report.

- **Part 1 – Market Analysis:** This document assesses transit demand in the Greater Portland region.
- **Part 2 – Existing Service:** This document describes the current condition of the regional transit system.
- **Part 3 – Regional Service Delivery and Coordination:** This document describes the individual transit agencies in the Greater Portland region, their past and ongoing coordination efforts, and common challenges and opportunities.

## DOCUMENT OVERVIEW

This document reviews of the seven public transportation providers operating in the Greater Portland region, with a focus on regional operational characteristics and interfaces. It also summarizes the regional planning and funding framework that helps guide and support regional transit operations, summarizes past coordination efforts, and highlights current regional goals for greater coordination. Overall, it is focused on the 'non-service'-related topics that in some way have an impact on transit riders.

This information is important context for coordination recommendations that will be made later in the Transit Together study. The report has three primary content chapters:

- **Transit Agency Profiles:** Describes the varying governance structure and mission of each agency.
- **Regional Planning and Funding Framework:** Describes the regional transit-planning process and PACTS' role in allocating federal transit funds. One of these roles is establishing a regional vision and strategies for improving transit; these strategies include a goal for increased regional collaboration.
- **Regional Collaboration:** Reviews the history of coordination among regional transit providers and highlights opportunities for advancing this regional goal.



## KEY FINDINGS

### Administration and Governance

- The Greater Portland region has seven different public transportation providers, each operating in different geographic areas with different overall missions. However, there are areas where their customer bases and services intersect or overlap.
- Local contributions to support transit service vary greatly. Each community is assessed differently, has a different ability to pay, and uses different sources of funding.

### Fleet Planning

- Given the high cost of vehicles, fleet investments can be significant, particularly if several agencies have large replacement needs in any one given year.
- Regional fleet planning could help 'smooth out' the impact of vehicle replacement costs in any given year. For example:
  - Casco Bay Lines (CBL) has the smallest fleet of revenue vehicles (five ferries) but with individual ship replacement costs as high as \$20 million, ferry replacement represents a significant percentage of available capital funds.
  - The BSOOB Transit and METRO fleets comprise the bulk of the region's vehicle replacement needs, and a large wave of vehicle replacement is expected in about 10 years.
- All current transit fleets are primarily diesel-fueled. Some agencies are beginning to deploy electric vehicles.
- Additional electrification studies (e.g., an ongoing Maine Department of Transportation study) and this study will inform how agencies could conduct more joint procurement/asset sharing.

### Passenger Facilities and Bus Stops

- Except for the Saco Transportation Center, intermodal terminals lack strong transit connections. The Portland Transportation Center (PTC) is minimally served and does not have a direct connection to the Casco Bay Ferry Terminal. The ferry terminal is only served by METRO Route 8, which provides circuitous connections to the METRO PULSE; there are no direct



connections between the ferry terminal and the PTC, South Portland, or the Portland International Jetport.

- There is limited covered or sheltered outdoor waiting space at the METRO PULSE.
- There are several common stops where fixed-route transit providers meet, but schedules are not coordinated, few passenger amenities are offered, and operators use a confusing mix of transit-stop signage.

### **Marketing, Branding, and Customer Service**

- Each of the seven individual agencies operates under a distinct brand. Marketing activities and customer service are also largely independent, except for occasional joint efforts (e.g., DiriGO) or other special events.
- Better coordinating branding, marketing, and customer service is one of several regional coordination actions agreed to by the boards of all seven agencies in 2007 and a subsequent *Regional Branding and Marketing Plan* was led by PACTS in 2013.
- The recommendations proposed a unified logo for the three fixed-route bus operators that was designed to work with existing logos. It would be used on signage and promotional materials to tie regional services together.
- The recommendations were never implemented due to concerns about eliminating individual brands. However, these recommendations are still relevant and would help make regional transit more seamless for the rider. They include:
  - Developing a unified logo and color scheme for the bus operators.
  - Developing a coordinated website in two phases: Phase 1 would build a splash webpage with links to individual providers; Phase 2 would build an integrated website, giving each agency access and the ability to make updates.
  - Coordinating customer service: one phone number for all three providers
- More recently, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, GPCOG convened a Regional Transit Marketing Task Force to jointly direct a portion of federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding toward marketing and reattracting riders to the transit system. The group could potentially be re-established to conduct further regional marketing or to address other related topics such as signage, branding, and a central website with transit information.



## Technology

- Some regional transit providers collaborate on efforts such as DiriGO. However, most efforts are still undertaken independently.
- Stronger collaboration and coordination in several areas could further the development of a seamless regional system, such as:
  - Adoption by all providers of schedule information via GTFS-RT (General Transit Feed Specification Realtime) for mapping websites and third-party travel apps.
  - DiriGO fare payment for all providers.

## Fare Policies and Payment

- Base bus fare is largely consistent for local routes, but not for longer-distance regional routes. Other fare policies and discounts vary more widely across agencies.
- Advance ticketing availability also varies. DiriGO offers the most convenient fare-payment system that automatically makes certain discounts available, however the availability of fare sales off the Peninsula could be enhanced.
- Although both have broader missions and provide human services transportation, Regional Transportation Program and York County Community Action Corporation could be brought under the DiriGO umbrella. Casco Bay Lines has their own online reservation and ticketing system, but it may also be possible to provide scanners that could read DiriGO cards as passengers are boarding.

## Regional Planning and Coordination

- Regional transportation and transit goals have been developed with broad public input and remained relatively consistent over the past 15 years. Overarching strategies to enhance regional transit include:
  - Promoting seamless transit connections across the region
  - Improving the frequency, travel time, and convenience of transit
  - Extending transit services and increasing the use of transit services
  - Prioritizing investments in key transit corridors
  - Embedding a regional focus into PACTS decision-making and investments
- There are limited financial resources to advance regional goals and public priorities for enhanced transit. Regional plans emphasize the need to capture



operational efficiencies or identify new revenues to support desired improvements.

- Although transit agency consolidation has been discussed since the 1990s as a way to be more efficient, when interviewed for this project each agency director expressed little appetite for consolidation. However, each explicitly recognized the benefits of recent coordination efforts, expressed a willingness to do more, and suggested potential opportunities. They indicated general support for regional priorities identified through the PACTS planning process, as well as the critical need to improve service and attract riders in the wake of COVID-19 and amid climate concerns.

Joint board meetings have periodically been hosted by GPCOG to reaffirm regional goals and seek support for interagency cooperation. At a 2020 meeting, attendees voiced support for better unifying the regional network to provide more seamless travel, and for investing in regional branding, priority corridors, and transit frequency. They expressed a willingness to meet more frequently to advance such goals.





## 2 TRANSIT AGENCY PROFILES

The seven public transit providers in the Greater Portland region include:

- Biddeford, Saco, Old Orchard Beach Transit (BSOOB Transit)
- Casco Bay Lines (CBL), formally known as Casco Bay Island Transit District (CBITD)
- Greater Portland Transit District (METRO)
- Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA; operates Downeaster)
- Regional Transportation Program (RTP)
- South Portland Bus Service (SPBS)
- York County Community Action Program (YCCAC)

The sections below provide information on each agency's governance structure and other operational and administrative characteristics. These providers serve varying markets (see Figure 1) and operate a range of modes. More detail on the actual services provided by each agency can be found in Part 2 of the *State of Regional Transit* report.

### GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Public transportation in Maine is primarily administered through three state statutes.<sup>1</sup> These statutes enable the seven regional transit providers.

### Transit Districts

One or more municipalities may vote to form or join a transit district. METRO and BSOOB Transit are transit districts. Alternatively, a single municipality may vote to provide transit without the creation of a formal district. South Portland provides such a service.

By statute, each municipality is entitled to appoint one representative to a transit district board of directors for each 10,000 inhabitants; METRO is specially enabled to use a

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<sup>1</sup> Titles 23 (Transportation), 30-A (Municipalities and Counties) and 35-A (Public Utilities).





## Special Transit Districts and Providers

The State of Maine enables other types of districts and providers to operate or contract for transit service. In Greater Portland, these special entities include:

- **Regional Transportation Corporations:** Non-profit entities may provide public transportation services to one or more municipalities. The corporation must be approved by each community receiving service and certified by the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT). RTP and YCCAC are regional transit corporations, each managed by autonomous boards of directors.
- **Casco Bay Island Transit District:** CBITD is a quasi-public entity administered and regulated by MaineDOT and the Public Utilities Commission. It was established to provide affordable year-round passenger, freight, and vehicle transportation to the islands as a critical service for these communities.  
  
CBITD is the only public transit agency authorized to transport passengers to and from Peaks, Great Diamond, Little Diamond, Long, Chebeague, and Cliff islands. Representation on its Board of Directors is by statute.
- **Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority:** NNEPRA is a quasi-public entity established to initiate, establish, and promote regularly scheduled passenger rail service within Maine or to points outside the state. Representation on its board of directors is by statute.



Figure 2-2 Agency Governance Structures

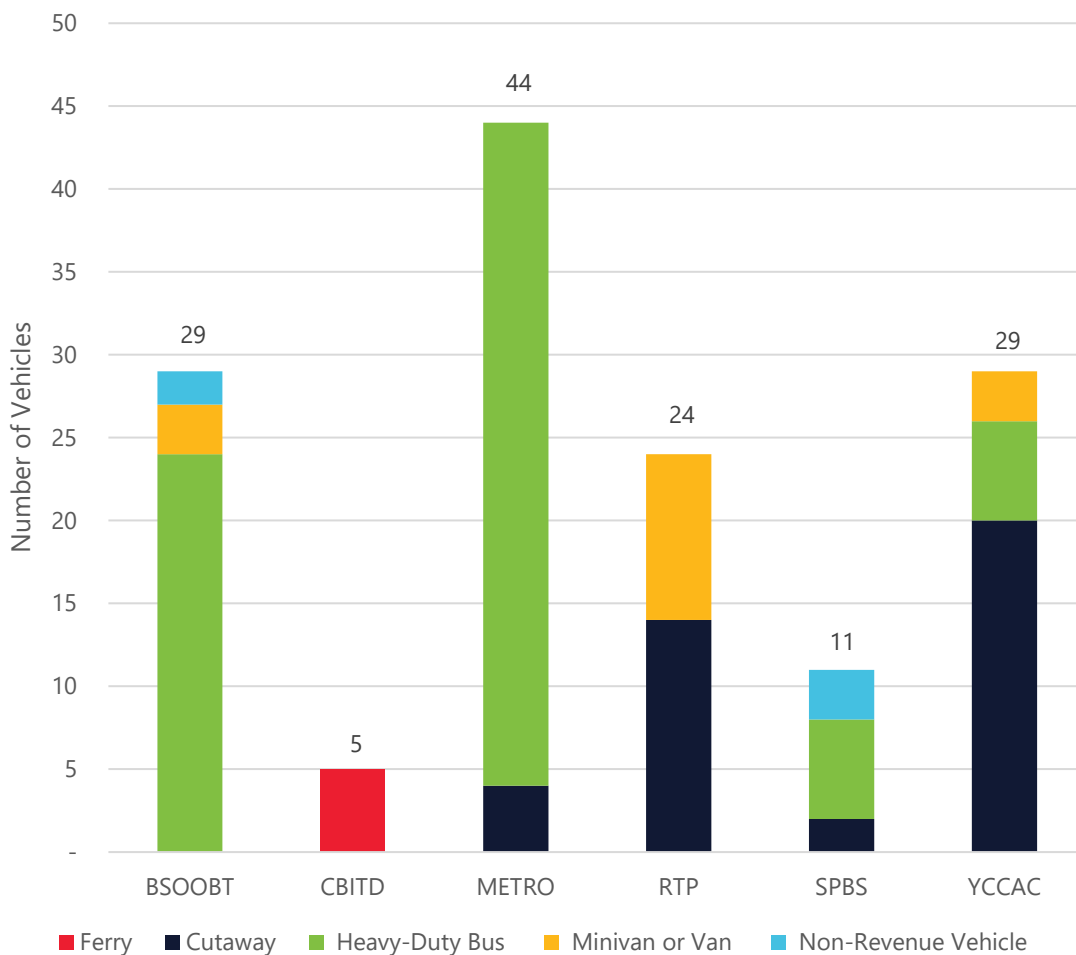
Provider	Primary Services Provided	Governance Structure	Board Structure/ Members
BSOOB Transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accessible fixed-route service in member communities</li> <li>▪ Connections to Scarborough, South Portland, and Portland</li> </ul>	Transit district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 3 representatives from each member municipality</li> </ul>
CBITD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Year-round scheduled passenger, freight, and auto ferry service between Portland and Casco Bay Islands</li> </ul>	Special transit district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Representatives from Peaks Island (3), other islands (5), other state residents (2), Portland (1), and MaineDOT (1)</li> </ul>
METRO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fixed-route bus service in member communities, Gorham, and South Portland.</li> </ul>	Transit district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Representatives from Portland (5), Westbrook (3), Falmouth (2), Yarmouth (1), Freeport (1), and Brunswick (1)</li> <li>▪ Weighted votes: Portland 50%</li> </ul>
NNEPRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supports and coordinates Amtrak Downeaster service</li> </ul>	Quasi-public entity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Five gubernatorial appointees and two ex-officio (MaineDOT and Maine Department of Economic and Community Development)</li> </ul>
RTP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Deviated fixed-route bus service between Portland and Bridgton</li> <li>▪ On-demand transportation for people in Cumberland County</li> <li>▪ ADA paratransit for METRO and SPBS</li> </ul>	Regional transportation corporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 8-member autonomous board</li> </ul>
SPBS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fixed-route service in South Portland with connections to Portland</li> </ul>	Transit district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Subcommittee of City Council</li> <li>▪ 3-member Transit Advisory Committee</li> </ul>
YCCAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Deviated fixed-route bus service between Sanford and Saco</li> <li>▪ Accessible on-demand and flex services</li> </ul>	Regional transportation corporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 14-member autonomous board</li> </ul>



## FLEETS AND FLEET PLANNING

The study agencies own and operate about 140 total transit vehicles, excluding Downeaster vehicles, which are owned and operated by Amtrak. Over half of these vehicles are heavy-duty buses, about a quarter are cutaway buses, five are ferries, and the remainder are vans, minivans, and non-revenue vehicles. METRO operates the most vehicles (44), while BSOOB Transit and YCCAC operate the second-most vehicles, at 29 (Figure 2-3). SPBS has the smallest revenue vehicle fleet, with six heavy-duty buses and two cutaways.

**Figure 2-3 Greater Portland Transit Vehicles by Agency**



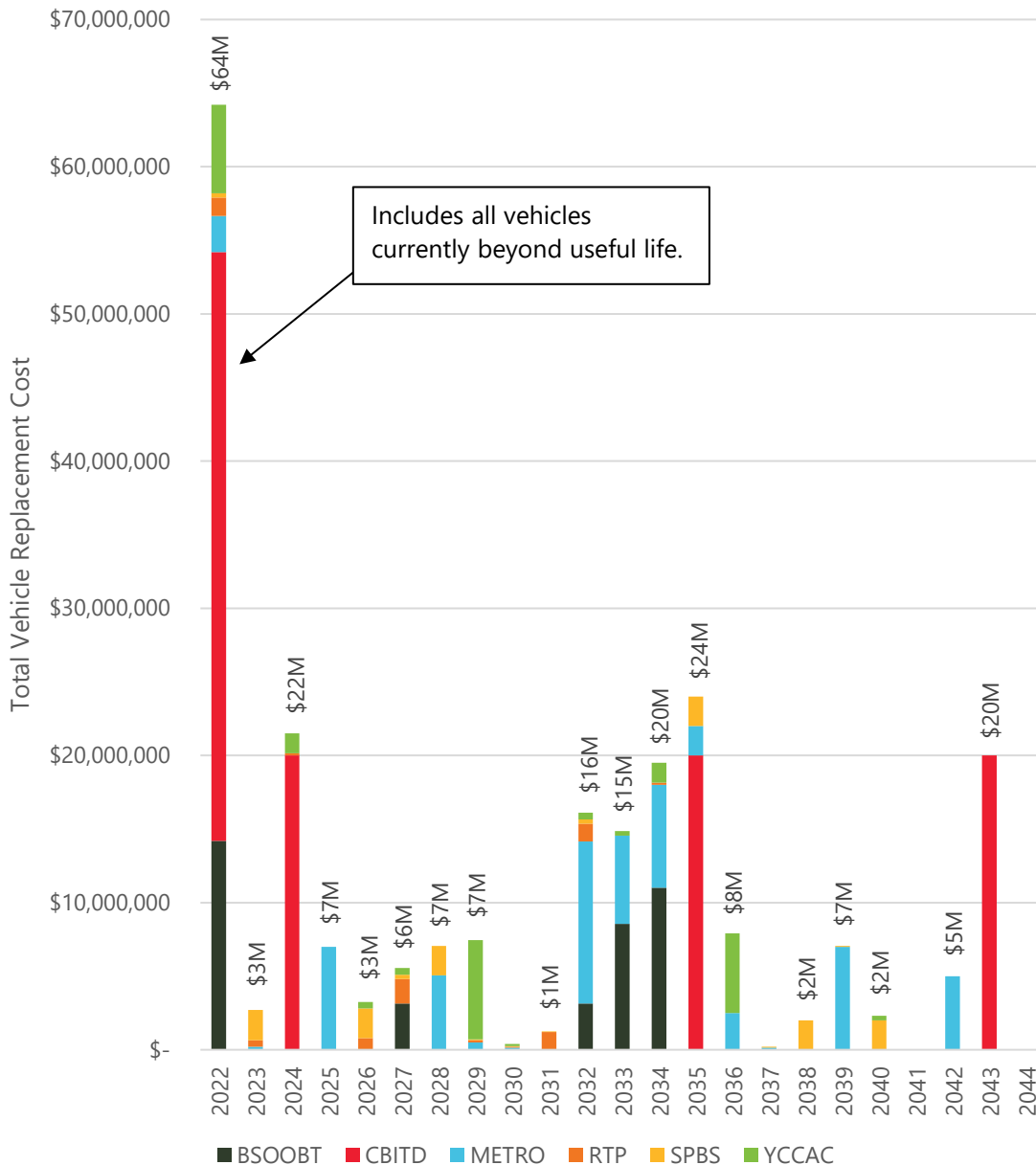
Note: Vehicles used for the Downeaster are not shown because NNEPRA does not own or operate the vehicles.

Using industry standards for this metric, a rough estimate of region-wide transit agency vehicle replacement needs finds that nearly 50 vehicles in the region’s fleet are beyond their useful life and 13 more have less than 20% of their useful life remaining. Fleet replacement needs are most pressing for BSOOB Transit, RTP, and YCCAC.



Using assumed replacement values for each vehicle type, Figure 2-4 shows the annual total costs for transit vehicle replacement in the region (with the cost of replacing all vehicles currently beyond their useful life allocated to 2022). Ferry replacement, at a high-level estimate of \$20 million, is by far the largest driver of regional vehicle replacement costs. Outside of CBITD, the BSOOB Transit and METRO fleets comprise the bulk of the region’s vehicle replacement needs, with the largest wave of vehicle replacement expected to be needed in approximately 2032 to 2034.

Figure 2-4 Annual Vehicle Replacement Costs by Agency



Note: Chart assumes vehicles are replaced at the end of their useful lives.



## FACILITIES

The study agencies serve a total of 21 key transit facilities in the Greater Portland region.

### Passenger Facilities

There are two large multimodal facilities in the Greater Portland region.

- The **Saco Transportation Center (STC)** is served by the Downeaster, BSOOB Transit, YCCAC, and Greyhound intercity bus lines. It has an indoor passenger waiting area within view of both the rail and bus loading platforms. Located on the town line just north of Biddeford, it has good pedestrian access to both downtown Saco and Biddeford.
- The **Portland Transportation Center (PTC)** is located west of I-295 off Fore River Parkway and serves the Downeaster, METRO, and Concord Coach Lines. Two METRO routes stop at the station; there are no BSOOB Transit or SPBS connections. NNEPRA has proposed relocating this facility to the mainline, between Congress Street and W Commercial Street, to improve operations and decrease travel times for people riding through Portland.

Other **Downeaster stations** in the region have local bus connections and serve as smaller intermodal facilities. The METRO BREEZ stops a few blocks from Freeport Station and at Brunswick Station; the Brunswick Link local bus and BlueLine Commuter also serve this station. BSOOB Transit service is available at the Old Orchard Beach Station.

There are two bus hubs:

- The Portland **METRO PULSE** (also called Downtown Transportation Center) is on Elm Street between Congress Street and Cumberland Avenue. The PULSE is served directly by METRO and the RTP Lakes Region Explorer (LRE), and by nearby METRO, BSOOB Transit, and SPBS stops. This facility has some passenger amenities, but the outdoor waiting area is largely exposed to the elements. Intercity bus service does not serve this stop.
- The **Mill Creek Transit Hub** is on the corner of Ocean and Thomas streets in South Portland. This serves as a transfer point for SPBS routes and has an indoor waiting area for riders.
- The **Casco Bay Ferry Terminal** is the mainland dock for all CBL ferries. This newly renovated facility is served by METRO Route 8, which deviates into the terminal from Commercial Street. Ferry passengers looking to connect with other bus services must transfer at the METRO PULSE. There is no one-seat ride from the ferry terminal to the PTC, Jetport, or South Portland.



## Bus Stops

There are about 940 transit stops in the Greater Portland region. Twenty-six are served by BSOOB Transit and YCCAC, and METRO serves several stops with BSOOB Transit, SPBS and/or RTP’s LRE. BSOOB Transit and RTP also allow passengers to flag down their vehicles at any safe location along a route.

Schedules are not coordinated at these locations and all five bus operators use a mix of different signage to identify their stops (Figure 2-6).

One of the highest-ridership of these common stops is at the Maine Mall, which is served by BSOOB Transit, METRO, and SPBS. This stop does offer real-time information.

**Figure 2-5 Summary Table of Agency Bus Stop Sign Elements**

Flag Element	BSOOB Transit	METRO	RTP	SPBS	YCCAC
Stop ID		✓			
Agency name	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Route name or number	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Route destination				✓	
Contact information		✓	✓	✓	
Lift-capable bus icon (where applicable)		✓			
Vehicle bike rack icon (where applicable)		✓	✓		





In general, METRO and SPBS signs include more information than BSOOB Transit signs, which have not all been updated since the agency changed its branding from SH-ZOOM to BSOOB Transit. Most METRO and SPBS stops in the Greater Portland region include a sign advertising the Southern Maine Transit Tracker (SMTT), which helps riders understand when the bus is arriving at the stops. YCCAC signs include very little information.

Figure 2-6 Photographs of Stop Flags for Study Fixed-Route Bus Agencies



Clockwise from top left: A BSOOB Transit flag showing silver duct-tape that indicates the stop is served by the Silver/UNE Line; a METRO flag with route schedule below; a SPBS flag; an RTP LRE flag; a YCCAC flag. Source: Nelson\Nygaard.



## Maintenance/Administrative Facilities

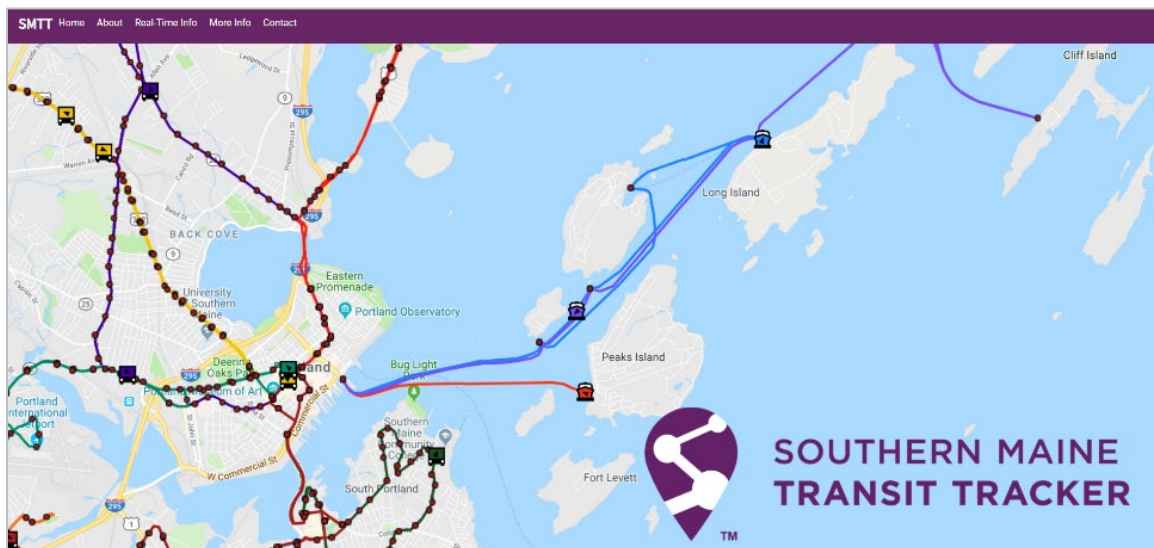
All seven agencies own or lease offices. Four agencies (BSOOB Transit, METRO, RTP, and SPBS) also have a vehicle maintenance facility. SPBS offices and a dedicated maintenance bay are in the City of South Portland's public works facility. These maintenance facilities support diesel and or diesel-electric technology, as well as some electric bus pilots; the agencies have just begun experimenting with zero-emissions vehicles.

YCCAC and CBL contract for maintenance, with YCCAC currently using BSOOB Transit for certain maintenance tasks. NNEPRA doesn't own or maintain vehicles; the Downeaster service is operated by Amtrak, which performs their own maintenance.

## TECHNOLOGY

There is some technological coordination among agencies. METRO, SPBS, BSOOB Transit, RTP, CBL, and Downeaster fixed-route vehicles are equipped with automatic vehicle location (AVL) technology, which provides real-time information on vehicle locations. AVL provides several benefits, including the ability to understand and address service problems, and to provide real-time passenger information. This technology could be extended to YCCAC vehicles to provide similar benefits.

Transit AVL data can be sent to websites and smartphone apps to give riders real-time vehicle location information. METRO, SPBS, and CBL already do this, sharing their information via the Southern Maine Transit Tracker (SMTT). Real-time information is available on the SMTT and other third-party apps, such as Transit App. Information on SMTT can be difficult to access and sometimes does not appear.



A screenshot of the SMTT landing page.



RTP and BSOOB Transit provide real-time information via their own website and—in the case of RTP—smartphone app. Although the BSOOB Transit real-time tracker is currently not functioning, they and RTP both equip their fixed-route vehicles with AVLs and could join others to publish real-time information via a consolidated third-party service. YCCAC could also install AVLs on their fixed-route vehicles and provide real-time information.

Amtrak provides Downeaster real-time information on its website and third-party apps.

Finally, METRO, SPBS, and BSOOB Transit use a common fare payment system, which is described in more detail below in the 'Fare Payment and Policies' section.

## **MARKETING, BRANDING, AND CUSTOMER SERVICE**

Each of the seven individual agencies has their own service area and market and operates under a distinct brand. Marketing activities and customer service are also largely independent, except for occasional joint efforts (e.g., DiriGO) or other special events. In general, customers looking to travel across the region may not be aware of the scope and breadth of services or how to find schedules and stops.

Better coordination of branding, marketing, and customer-service efforts was initially recommended (among other actions) as part of a PACTS Regional Transit Coordination Study in 2007 (see the Regional Collaboration chapter of this document). The boards of all seven agencies signed a joint resolution agreeing to advance these recommendations.

Following this study, the bus transit providers worked together to produce a regional map and timetable, and a subsequent 2013 Regional Branding and Marketing Plan (led by PACTS) with the following recommendations:

- Developing a unified logo and color scheme for the three fixed-route bus operators.
- This unified logo was designed to work with (rather than supersede) existing logos, and to be used on signage and promotional materials to tie regional services together.
- Developing a coordinated website in two phases: Phase 1 would build a splash webpage with links to individual providers; Phase 2 would build an integrated website, giving each agency access and the ability to make updates.
- Coordinating customer service: one phone number for all three providers.

Ultimately, the regional map and timetable was not regularly updated, and the branding and marketing recommendations were not advanced due in part to continued concerns about loss of individual agency brands.



On a more positive note, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, GPCOG convened a Regional Transit Marketing Task Force to jointly direct a portion of federal CARES Act funding toward attracting riders back to transit. This group met successfully for over a year before disbanding in early 2022 when funding was expended.

## FARE PAYMENT AND POLICIES

There are differences across the region in fare-payment technologies, base fares, the availability of pass products and other discounts, and transfer policies.

One-way base fare is consistent on BSOOB Transit, METRO, and SPBS. However, base fares on longer-distance regional bus routes varies:

- YCCAC's Southern Maine Explorer is currently \$2.00
- RTP charges \$3.00 for the Lakes Region Explorer
- METRO charges \$4.00 for BREEZ
- BSOOB Transit charges \$4.00 for Green Line trips<sup>2</sup> and \$5.00 for ZOOM

Base fares vary by destination and time of travel on both CBL and the Amtrak Downeaster.

BSOOB Transit, METRO, and SPBS are all part of the DiriGO fare system, which allows riders to pay for transit with a smartcard or mobile app. DiriGO allows riders to load money on their stored-value accounts with their mobile phone or at partner retailers. The Downeaster and CBL offer advance online ticket purchases.

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<sup>2</sup> As of December 2022, this fare had been temporarily reduced to \$2.00.



Agencies offer a variety of pass products and discounts, including round-trip, day, monthly, annual, and 10-ride passes. Fixed-route bus riders using the DiriGO fare system receive fare capping, ensuring they receive the benefit of discounts without needing to purchase a pass. DiriGO also provides free transfers between DiriGO agencies (within a 90-minute window). Figure 2-7 summarizes media accepted by each agency.

**Figure 2-7 Fare Media Accepted by Study Agencies on Fixed-Route Services**

Fare Media	BSOOB Transit	CBL	METRO	Down-easter	RTP	SPBS	YCCAC
Cash*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
DiriGO smartcard	✓		✓			✓	
DiriGO mobile app	✓		✓			✓	
Paper tickets		✓		✓	✓		
Other pass products		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

\* Cash accepted on buses and at CBL and Downeaster ticket windows. Credit/debit accepted via DiriGO, via Amtrak online ticketing, at the CBL and Downeaster ticket windows.



# 3 REGIONAL PLANNING AND FUNDING FRAMEWORK

## THE ROLE OF PACTS AND GPCOG

PACTS is the designated MPO for Greater Portland. Members include representatives from 18 communities, the seven regional transit providers, other federal and state transportation entities, and regional planning organizations. As noted in the introduction to this report, PACTS is responsible for creating plans and setting priorities related to local investment and expenditure of federal transportation funds, as well as coordinating other transportation activities.

GPCOG serves as technical staff to PACTS and performs other transportation-planning activities, including:

- Preparation of the annual Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to prioritize and program the spending of federal transportation dollars. The Five-Year Capital and Operating Plan (FYCOP) for transit is a TIP input.
- Preparation of short- and long-range strategic transportation plans and work programs.
- Other transit-planning and -support activities.

## PACTS Committees

Strategic policy and investment decisions are largely the responsibility of the PACTS Policy Board. The Policy Board is supported by other standing committees, with the Executive Board and Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) having the greatest influence over transit-planning and -investment decisions.

The Policy Board also periodically appoints special committees or working groups. The Transit Task Force Working Group is a non-voting group established to advise on transit-related technical matters.



The role and membership of these key committees is shown in Figure 3-1.

**Figure 3-1 PACTS Committees Involved with Transit**

Committee	Membership	Key Roles
Policy Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All member communities</li> <li>▪ 7 regional transit providers</li> <li>▪ Other federal and state transportation entities</li> <li>▪ Other regional stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establishes regional vision and sets strategic direction</li> <li>▪ Endorses long-range transp. plans</li> <li>▪ Adopts the annual TIP</li> <li>▪ Integrates transportation work with other regional issues</li> <li>▪ Appoints standing committees and special committees (e.g., the Transit Together Project Advisory Group)</li> </ul>
Executive Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Policy Board Chair and Vice-Chair</li> <li>▪ 3 transit providers (nominated by the 7 providers)</li> <li>▪ MaineDOT and Maine Turnpike Authority</li> <li>▪ 5 municipal members</li> <li>▪ 1 RTAC member</li> <li>▪ 1 active-transportation specialist.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Makes strategic recommendations to the Policy Board</li> <li>▪ Amends adopted TIP</li> <li>▪ Adopts updates to the FYCOP for transit</li> <li>▪ Coordinates allocation of FTA funds (the 'split process')</li> </ul>
RTAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 12 municipal representatives</li> <li>▪ 4 transit providers (nominated)</li> <li>▪ MaineDOT and Maine Turnpike Association</li> <li>▪ 5 other regional stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focuses on transportation-planning and -management issues</li> <li>▪ Endorses the FYCOP</li> <li>▪ Advises the Executive Committee on other technical, planning, and funding issues</li> </ul>
Transit Task Force Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 7 transit providers</li> <li>▪ MaineDOT</li> <li>▪ Policy Board Chair</li> <li>▪ RTAC Chair</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Serves an advisory role to RTAC, GPCOG staff, and Policy Board</li> <li>▪ Provides input to the FYCOP</li> </ul>



## THE ROLE OF MAINEDOT

MaineDOT plays many roles in the State of Maine. As the organization related to transportation in the Greater Portland region, the agency's primary roles are:

- Oversee the formation and administration of transit districts. MaineDOT approval is required if a district wants to provide service to a non-member municipality.
- Has legislative authority related to rail and water transportation.
- A direct recipient of federal transportation funds. MaineDOT is the direct recipient of federal funds for rural, senior, and human-services transportation and distributes these funds by geographic region. RTP and CBL are subrecipients in the Greater Portland region.
- Offer competitive state grants for senior and human-services projects.
- Provide support for intercity services.
- Responsible for compiling the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program and ensuring federal and statewide performance targets are met.

## REGIONAL TRANSIT FUNDING FRAMEWORK

### PACTS Five-Year Capital and Operating Plan

GPCOG staff help prepare and update the Five-Year Capital and Operating Plan (FYCOP) for transit. The FYCOP prioritizes available federal funding for transit across the region on an annual basis. Local match is provided by a mix of state and local funds.

There are five designated direct recipients of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds in the Greater Portland urbanized area: METRO, BSOOB Transit, SPBS, CBL, and NNEPRA. All recipients must agree on the process to split these annual funds (the 'split process'). The PACTS Executive Committee coordinates this process with input from the RTAC and Transit Working Group. As currently allocated:

- All FTA Preventative Maintenance (PM) funding is directed toward PM projects
- Other FTA funds support transit operations (88%) and system enhancements (12%)

The amount directed to each regional recipient is negotiated each year using metrics (such as staffing, operating budgets, etc.) as well as priority needs (e.g., fleet replacement). The Transit Task Force Working Group provides input on these needs. Ultimately, the FYCOP is endorsed by the RTAC and becomes part of the annual TIP.

#### The Split Process

PACTS recently convened a special committee to review and refine this process.





## Rural and Human-Services Transportation

MaineDOT is the direct recipient of FTA formula funds for rural and senior/human-services transportation. The State of Maine has established eight geographic regions for the distribution of these funds. CBL, RTP, and YCCAC are subrecipients.

Federal funds for rural transportation, as well as additional funding through the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, are prioritized through regular updates to the federally mandated Coordinated Plan for Public Transit and Human Services Transportation.

Direct FTA funding recipients may also apply for federal discretionary grants to support capital projects and other efforts.

## REGIONAL TRANSIT GOALS AND STRATEGIES

To comply with federal guidelines, MPOs such as PACTS are required to regularly update long-range transportation plans to establish regional investment strategies and priorities. PACTS has also prepared a long-range transit plan to further focus on and develop transit strategies.

## Destination 2040

The current long-range transportation plan for the region, *Destination 2040*, was adopted in 2016. The plan recognizes that transportation issues are regional and require a coordinated response. The plan further recognizes the role of transit as a solution to some of the region's mobility challenges.

Despite significant support for expanded transit, there is a gap between the funding available and the level of investment needed to meet demand. To address these challenges, the 20-year vision for regional transportation aims to create a more efficient multi-modal network.

### The 2040 Vision for Regional Transportation

*Provide a safe, fully developed, and well-maintained multi-modal 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.*

*Destination 2040 (2016)*



Figure 3-2 lists the six regional transportation goals established in *Destination 2040* and summarizes specific implementation strategies most relevant to regional transit and the *Transit Together* effort. GPCOG is now working to update this vision as part of a new long-range plan update, *Connect 2045*.

**Figure 3-2 Long-Range Transportation Goals and Relevant Transit Strategies (*Destination 2040*)**

Goal	Key Strategies Related to Transit
<p><u>Goal 1:</u> Maintain a Regional Focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tighten the relationship between regional funding and Destination 2040’s vision and goals</li> <li>▪ Incentivize collaboration by prioritizing projects that coordinate planning across jurisdictions</li> <li>▪ Collect data to assess outcome-oriented performance metrics</li> </ul>
<p><u>Goal 2:</u> Enable Economic Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritize investments in Priority Corridors and Centers</li> <li>▪ Improve the frequency, travel time, convenience, and amenities of bus and rail services</li> </ul>
<p><u>Goal 3:</u> Improve Mobility, Safety, and Accessibility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase mode share</li> <li>▪ Increase frequency and effectiveness of transit service</li> <li>▪ Provide express-bus service</li> <li>▪ Provide linkages to major hubs, centers and transfer points</li> <li>▪ Implement ITS for real time information and</li> <li>▪ Continue efforts to coordinate transit services, fares, and operations</li> <li>▪ Continue implementation of ADA accessibility</li> <li>▪ Expand capacity for aging and special-needs populations</li> <li>▪ Increase the availability and accessibility of transit, including through improved frequencies, operating hours, and reliability</li> <li>▪ Increase rider satisfaction and grow ridership through improved inter-agency connections and coordination</li> <li>▪ Promote transit corridor development across municipal boundaries through regional transit planning</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Goal 4:</u> Integrate Energy Conservation</li> <li>▪ <u>Goal 5:</u> Strengthen the Land Use/Transportation Connection</li> <li>▪ <u>Goal 6:</u> Protect Environmental Quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Convert transit fleets to alternative fuels</li> <li>▪ Use TDM strategies to increase the attractiveness of transit</li> <li>▪ Define TOD areas around transit nodes</li> <li>▪ Prioritize transportation investments in Priority Centers</li> </ul>



## Transit Tomorrow

Developing a long-range transit plan for the region was a key recommended action of *Destination 2040*. Adopted in early 2021, *Transit Tomorrow* is that long-range transit plan and sets a 30-year vision for enhancing public transit in the Greater Portland region by focusing on improving the efficiency of regional transit operations while growing the attractiveness and convenience of service.

### **The 2050 Regional Vision for Transit**

*Using our region's public transportation is faster and more affordable than driving a car. Our system is funded sustainably and provides reliable and seamless transportation for our community, including commuters, mainland and island residents, and people with mobility challenges. Our communities support the long-term viability of public transportation by focusing new homes and jobs where people already live and work*

*Transit Tomorrow (2021)*



*Transit Tomorrow's* overarching goals are to make transit more seamless, to bring a regional perspective to planning and funding decisions, and to maximize the overall benefits of transit investments. As shown in Figure 3-3, the plan sets four goals for regional transit and detailed strategies intended to guide PACTS as it makes regional funding decisions, sets infrastructure priorities, invests in new technology, and leads regional coordination.

**Figure 3-3 Regional Transit Goals and Strategies (*Transit Tomorrow*)**

Goal	Recommendations/Action Steps
<p><u>Goal 1:</u> Make Transit Easier</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adopt innovative customer service technology                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Unified mobility platform, web-based trip planning, fare payment, enhance paratransit communications</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Advance partnerships with businesses and institutions</li> <li>▪ Enhance first- and last-mile connections                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Better bus stops, ped. and bike connections, and microtransit pilots</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Strengthen coordination among transit providers                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Mobility management program to provide support across providers</li> <li>– Local working group to pursue/monitor coordination</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Improve door-to-door options                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– On-demand pilot programs and support for other paratransit and community-based programs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><u>Goal 2:</u> Create Frequent Connections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improve frequency and service hours</li> <li>▪ Add new local circulator routes</li> <li>▪ Create new regional routes</li> <li>▪ Advance the Transit Together study to develop an implementation plan and advance strategies to make the system more seamless and efficient</li> </ul>
<p><u>Goal 3:</u> Improve Rapid Transit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop regional rapid-transit corridors to connect key activity centers</li> </ul>
<p><u>Goal 4:</u> Create Transit-Friendly Places</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incentivize planning and funding to support development in areas served by transit and along future transit corridors.</li> </ul>



## 4 REGIONAL COLLABORATION

### SUMMARY OF PAST COLLABORATION

Although strategies to increase coordination for improved delivery of public transit in the Greater Portland region have been discussed for more than three decades, efforts to advance these strategies have accelerated in the past 15 years.

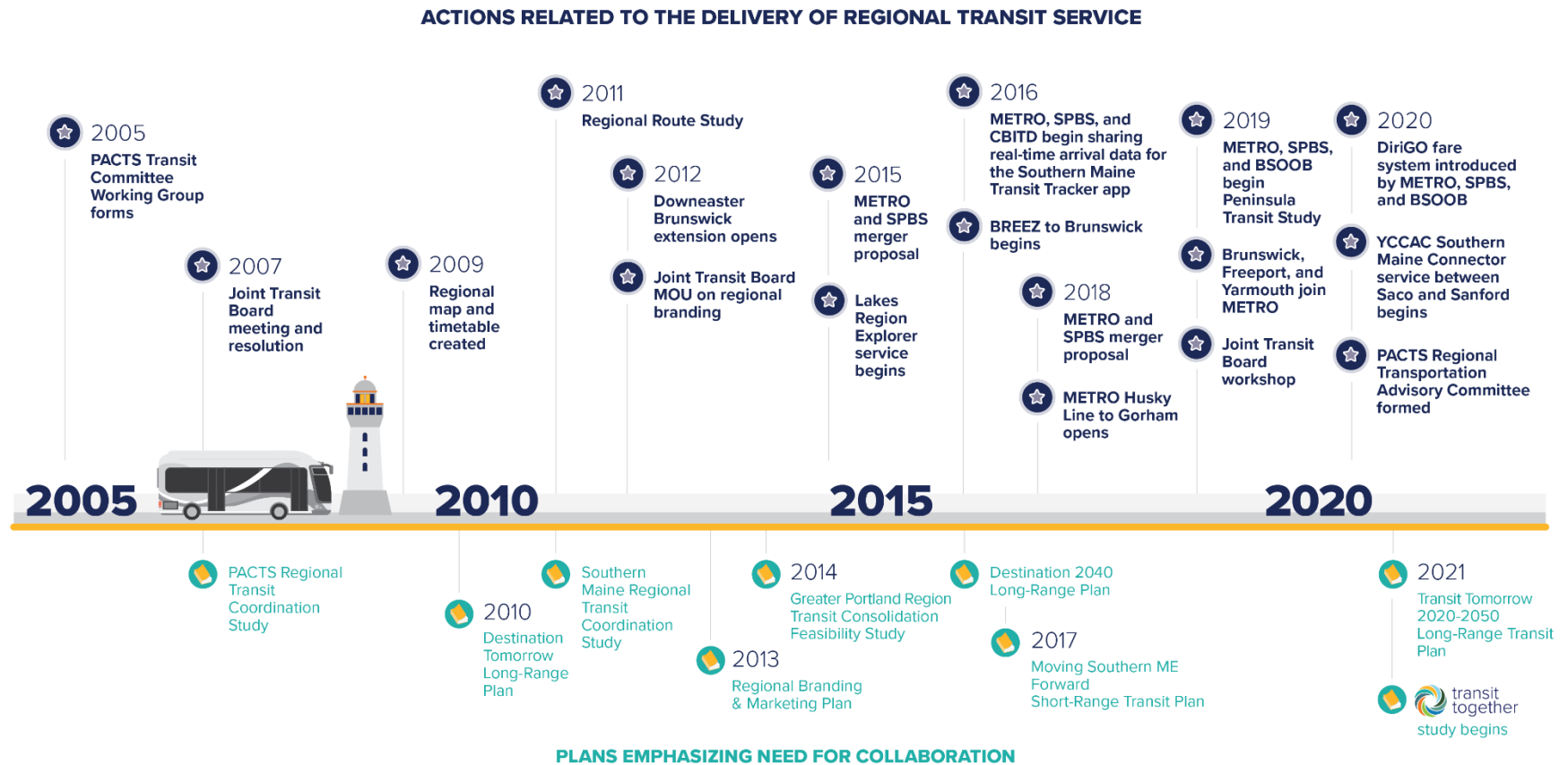
Initially, the topic of coordination focused on the potential for consolidating two or more of the regional transit providers, with PACTS conducting a *Consolidation Feasibility Study* in 1990. A primary outcome of this study was the formation of the first PACTS transit committee. Although this committee has evolved and expanded over time, the transit agencies continue to meet and inform the PACTS process through the Transit Task Force Working Group today.

In 2007, a *Regional Transit Coordination Study* looked to identify operational efficiencies in terms of regional transit-service delivery, as well as continuing to assess potential consolidation. This study also introduced the concept of better coordinating service delivery from the *riders' perspective*, which continues to be a regional goal today.

Since the conclusion of this 2007 study, regional transit providers have collaborated on numerous projects to try to make regional travel more seamless, introducing new regional routes and technologies. A timeline of coordination efforts is in Figure 4-1.



Figure 4-1 Timeline of Regional Transit Collaboration Efforts (2005-2021)





## CURRENT AND ONGOING COLLABORATION

In addition to the Transit Task Force Working Group that advises the PACTS RTAC and GPCOG on transit issues of regional interest, the following collaboration efforts are ongoing.

### Service-Planning Coordination

Transit agencies have worked together on periodic and specific efforts to better coordinate services in areas where more than one provider operates. Examples include:

- The *Peninsula Transit Study* which looked to better coordinate BSOOB Transit, METRO, and SPBS operations along Congress Street and other Peninsula corridors. It included coordination with Casco Bay Lines and RTP. This study was put on hold pending the service redesign efforts of this Transit Together study.
- BSOOB Transit and SPBS are working to create a new connection near MaineHealth facilities in Scarborough.
- GPCOG is advancing a *Gorham-Westbrook-Portland Rapid Transit Study* with close involvement of METRO and NNEPRA. The study will consider bus and rail alternatives to offer faster, higher-capacity service connecting Gorham, Westbrook, and Portland. The study will consider both bus and rail alternatives.

### Regional Transit Marketing Task Force

As mentioned earlier, GPCOG convened a Regional Transit Marketing Task Force in 2021 to direct a portion of federal COVID-19 relief funding for regional marketing and to help bring riders back to transit. The group facilitated the marketing of regional transit and publicized ongoing transit plans, transit improvement projects, and other regional efforts. The group met for over a year before disbanding in early 2022, when funding was expended.



## Joint Transit Board Workshops

Representatives from the boards of directors of the seven transit providers occasionally meet to discuss or formally endorse regional transit strategies and significant transit projects.

Three joint board meetings have been held over the last 15 years:

- **2007:** All seven boards signed a resolution recognizing the need for regional integration of planning, operations, marketing, and capital investment to make the system more seamless for riders. The resolution endorsed recommendations for regional branding, marketing, timetables/maps, and route studies. It further emphasized that transit policy and service delivery should be made with a regional perspective while balancing local control over operating and funding decisions with a need for greater integration.
- **2012:** Six boards signed a joint memorandum to: 1) continue to advance recommendations from the *2007 Regional Coordination Study*; 2) develop a *Regional Branding and Marketing Plan* (completed in 2013); and 3) coordinate on other regional projects and initiatives. NNEPRA signed as a supporting partner. Although the boards agreed to use existing operating revenues to implement branding and marketing recommendations, the final recommendations of the 2013 study (to create a unified logo, color scheme, and centralized information resources) were never implemented.
- **2020:** All seven boards reconvened as part of Transit Tomorrow to discuss the long-term regional vision, identify priority investments, and build relationships for further collaboration. They voiced support for better unifying the regional network to provide more seamless transit, investing in regional branding and priority corridors, and increasing transit frequency. Board members also recognized challenges to achieving these goals, such as:
  - Long-term funding/sustainability
  - Barriers to interagency transfer (timetables, route alignments, fare policies)
  - Misperceptions about transit reliability and convenience
  - Fragmentation across the seven agencies
  - Land-use patterns that don't efficiently support transit and the need for more political support for transit

### Joint Board Priorities

At their most recent meeting, board members voiced support for better unifying the regional network to provide more seamless travel and investing in:

- Common regional branding
- Priority corridors
- Transit frequency

Most attendees indicated a willingness to hold joint meetings several times a year.





## POTENTIAL FUTURE EFFORTS

In a series of one-on-one interviews in fall 2021, the Transit Together team asked stakeholders about the success of past collaboration efforts and to elaborate on any challenges or opportunities related to future collaboration.

Executive directors at the seven transit providers voiced strong commitments to their constituents, with most expressing little interest in agency consolidation. However, each interviewee was able to point to one or more examples of recent interagency coordination that introduced operating efficiencies or improved service for their customers (e.g., the DiriGO fare system, open procurements, shared YCCAC/BSOOB Transit maintenance practices).

Recognizing the benefits of this coordination (as well as the challenges and tradeoffs), these directors expressed a willingness to further collaborate to better serve regional transit riders and increase the efficiency and reach of limited regional transit funding. Providers further recognized that recovering from recent ridership drops due to COVID-19 increased the need to seek regional efficiencies.

### Short-Term Needs, Gaps, and Opportunities Identified by Regional Stakeholders

Areas suggested by regional stakeholders as providing opportunity for further coordination include:

- **Improve interdistrict and intermodal connections:** Extend routes, identify new connection points, and/or coordinate schedules to offer timed connections.
- **Increase the frequency of transit on high-ridership routes.**
- **Consider microtransit or other new service models in lower density areas.**
- **Offer enhanced passenger amenities** at hubs and more consistent bus signage across the region.
- **Improve branding, marketing, and customer information:** Make transit more accessible, easier to navigate, and more seamless by re-assessing the previous proposal for regional branding, considering regional 'U-Pass' or other products, and sharing customer information resources.
- **Coordinate:** Pursue avenues to share knowledge, pursue new technologies, conduct joint procurements, engage in workforce development and training, pursue grants for regional programs, install regional bus-charging stations, etc.
- **Enhance technology and interoperability:** Make the benefits of technologies such as SMTT and DiriGO more consistently available across the region and



introduce other new capabilities. Improve interagency communications and GTFS feeds to support regional information-sharing, emergency operations and other functions.

- **Improve data collection:** Improve data collection capabilities with automated passenger counters and regional AVL capabilities.
- **Ensure Equity:** Allocate funding in a fair, logical, and transparent manner. Consider the impact of varied fare levels and local contributions across the region. Set baseline service standards, use performance metrics, and set incentives to increase service efficiency and effectiveness.

Some providers cited limited staff resources as a key hurdle to coordination. Others stressed the need to achieve greater regional parity in terms of transit investment.

The two non-providers interviewed (PACTS and MaineDOT) also expressed a desire to improve regional transit service for riders, but their primary concerns related to delivering services in the most efficient manner across the region.

Finally, many of those interviewed reiterated transit's critical role in helping to achieve broader state, regional, and local goals such as reduced greenhouse gas emissions, economic development, improved public health, and rider education.