

Regional Transportation Advisory Committee

June 1, 2021

9:00 a.m.

DRAFT Meeting Minutes

Seat	Representative	Attendance
PACTS Southern – Municipal	Diana Asanza	Y
PACTS Southern – Planning/ Economic Development	Denise Clavette	
PACTS Southern – Public Works/ Engineering	Tom Milligan	Y
PACTS Central – Municipal	Matt Sturgis	Y
PACTS Central – Planning/ Economic Development	Nell Donaldson	Y
PACTS Central – Public Works/ Engineering	Doug Howard	Y
PACTS Western – Municipal	Bill Giroux	
PACTS Western – Planning/ Economic Development	Amanda Lessard	Y
PACTS Western – Public Works/ Engineering	Bob Burns	Y
PACTS Northern – Municipal	Bill Shane	Y
PACTS Northern – Planning/ Economic Development	Theo Holtwijk	Y
PACTS Northern – Public Works/ Engineering	Adam Bliss	Y
Transit	Hank Berg	
Transit	Patricia Quinn	Y
Transit	Donna Tippett	Y
Transit	Robert Currie	Y
MaineDOT	Tom Reinauer	Y
Maine Turnpike Authority	Rebecca Grover	Y
Active Transportation Specialist	Jean Sideris	Y
Environmental Specialist	Christian MilNeil	Y
Community Transportation Leader	Leeann Brionez	Y
Community Transportation Leader	Mireille Kabongo	Y
Private Sector Trade Association	Eamonn Dundon	Y

1. Welcome

Nell Donaldson opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

2. Public Comment

No public comment was received.

3. Approval of the May 4, 2021 RTAC Meeting Minutes

Matt Sturgis moved to accept the May 4, 2021 meeting minutes as written; Tom Milligan seconded. All were in favor.

4. Staff Report

Committee Member Mentoring

PACTS would like to offer a mentoring program, matching new PACTS committee members with experienced PACTS committee members. Anyone who is interested in either role—mentor or mentee—should email Aubrey Miller, GPCOG staff.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update

PACTS is beginning the process of updating *Destination 2040*, the current metropolitan transportation plan. The plan, which has a 25-year outlook, is also sometimes referred to as the long-range transportation plan. PACTS is federally required to update the plan every five years. The plan sets the **vision for how PACTS wants to invest in the region's transportation system.**

PACTS is putting together a project advisory committee to help guide the direction of the plan. The project advisory committee will meet bimonthly beginning in late June or early July, until the fall of 2022. A roster of potential representatives is shown in the staff report. PACTS is recruiting volunteers for about 15 of the 21 seats; the other seats will be filled by transit agencies and federal and state partners. Anyone who is interested should fill out the brief [MTP Project Advisory Committee Sign-Up Form](#) by June 11.

For anyone not able to serve on the project advisory committee, there will be an opportunity to sign up for email updates. Also, PACTS committees, including RTAC, will be updated regularly, and there will be a public engagement process. Anyone who has questions about the metropolitan transportation plan may contact Rick Harbison, GPCOG staff.

Patricia Quinn asked about the number of transit agency representatives, noting there are three transit modes in the region and the project advisory committee currently has two seats for transit. Rick said he would be open to adding a third seat, but noted that having all seven transit agencies on the committee would make the committee very large. He said he also plans to hold stakeholder meetings with the transit agencies throughout the development of the plan. Kristina Egan, GPCOG staff, added that RTAC

and the Policy Board, on which all transit agencies are represented, will be reviewing the metropolitan transportation plan, so there will be plenty of opportunity for input. In response to a question from Tom Milligan, Chris Chop, GPCOG staff, said no formal action by RTAC is required to add a transit representative to the project advisory committee; PACTS staff will consider it.

5. Review of Proposed Concord Coach Lines CARES Act Phase IV Request

The *Review of Proposed Concord Coach Lines CARES Act Phase IV Request* is the first of three CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act federal transit funding items on the agenda. All three CARES Act items are for Phase IV (July-December 2021) allocations. This item is about CARES Act funding being allocated under Priority 1: maintaining regional transit service in light of reduced ridership and passenger-based revenues. Last month RTAC recommended allocation of the transit **agencies' requests for Phase IV Priority 1 funding**, but wanted more information about Concord Coach Lines' request.

Nell asked for public comment and there was none.

Christian MilNeil said he would rather save the funds for local intercity services and commented that \$1.5 million seems like a lot of money. Benjamin Blunt of Concord Coach Lines explained that it would be a net cost reimbursement contract—Concord submits revenues and costs to MaineDOT every month MaineDOT cuts a check for the difference. Ben added that Concord is operating 50% of the service it operated before the pandemic and this funding would allow Concord to add service, bring back staff, and hopefully increase ridership to put the company in a better position to be self-sufficient. He noted that Concord was previously funded entirely by farebox revenue, which was wiped out. Concord is simply asking for an operating subsidy to enable them to build their service back up.

Eamonn Dundon asked, if this were approved today, how much CARES Act funding would remain and what would the timeframe be for spending it. Andrew Clark, GPCOG staff, said roughly \$16 million would remain. The internal deadline for spending the CARES Act funding is the end of the 2022, but there is no formal deadline. Phase IV goes until the end of 2021, and then Phases V and VI will be in 2022.

Donna Tippet asked about the June 2020 letter from Kristina Egan to Benjamin Blunt regarding CARES Act funding in Phases II and III, and the condition that it be a one-time request for funding. Donna added that a lack of drivers is preventing South Portland Bus Service from restoring service and she cannot compete with the wages paid by Concord Coach Lines. Kristina explained that the June 2020 letter was put together based on a conversation among transit committee members, and the intent of the conditions was to be clear that there would not be an ongoing commitment of public funds for a

private entity. At the time, there was hope Concord's ridership would increase and perhaps Concord would not even use all the funds, but ridership has not come back as quickly as we hoped.

Patricia, noting that CARES was established to keep and restore service and to keep people employed, asked Ben about **Concord's** service and employment levels. Ben said that through the first quarter of 2021, Concord was at about 10% of pre-pandemic ridership. Last week Concord reached about 24% of pre-pandemic ridership. Into the first quarter of the year, Concord was running 8 trips/day and just recently increased to 14 trips/day; Concord ran 28 trips/day pre-pandemic. Concord is not requesting funding to get back to 28 trips/day, but is hoping to get to 20 trips/day by the end of the year, which would support getting a large portion of the staff back.

Mireille Kabongo, noting that she is an immigrant from the Democratic Republic of Congo, explained that immigrants must travel to Boston for immigration court and most use Concord Coach Lines to get there. She said Concord Coach Lines is part of the community and she supports helping them.

Rebecca Grover, noting that RTAC is making a recommendation to the Executive Board, requested that staff carry forward **committee members'** concerns. Kristina said staff will include a summary of the discussion in the staff report and added that Tom Milligan is now the RTAC representative on the Executive Board.

Tom Reinauer voiced **MaineDOT's support for Concord Coach's request and said the Department was** not concerned about the conditions in the June 2020 letter, since so much was unknown at that time. Concord Coach Lines is a key partner in the region.

Matt Sturgis moved that RTAC recommend Concord Coach Line's CARES Act Phase IV Priority 1 request for \$1,522,583 in CARES Act funding to the PACTS Executive Board for approval. Bill Shane seconded. All were in favor.

Tom Milligan asked **if Donna's concerns could be revisited after this allocation and Chris Chop said** they could be discussed in future CARES phases.

6. Rapid Transit Study – CARES Phase IV, Priority 3

The *Rapid Transit Study – CARES Phase IV, Priority 3* is the second of three CARES Act federal transit funding items on the agenda. This item (rapid transit study) and the next item (autonomous vehicle (AV) shuttle pilot) are about funding being allocated in Phase IV (July-December 2021) under Priority 3 (innovation).

As outlined in the April 7, 2021 memo from Chris Chop to PACTS Board and Committee members, staff recommended, in Phase IV, limiting Priority 3 projects to those which had been under consideration by the former PACTS Transit Committee through Phase III, and, in Phases V and VI, issuing a call for Priority 3 projects and evaluating them according to the Transportation Funding Framework. The Priority 3 projects that had been under consideration by the former PACTS Transit Committee through Phase III are the rapid transit study and the AV shuttle pilot.

In late 2020, the PACTS Transit Committee decided to recommend allocation of \$25,000 in CARES Act Phase III (January-June 2021) funds to scope the rapid transit study, and shift the study itself to Phase IV (July-December 2021) after the completion of *Transit Tomorrow*, the region's long-range public transportation plan. At that time, staff noted there should be an expectation that the project would move forward under Phase IV so that CARES Act funding would not be spent scoping a study that would not ultimately be funded. The rapid transit study received support from both the Transit Committee and the Executive Committee and was identified as a priority for the region. *Transit Tomorrow* was unanimously approved in March 2021 and GPCOG then launched a national search to find someone to lead the rapid transit study scoping effort and to manage the project itself. GPCOG hired Colin Burch in April 2021.

Rapid transit is a service that travels quickly, runs on schedule, and can accommodate a lot of passengers. Some key features include dedicated space (e.g., rail line or dedicated bus lane), offboard fare collection, elevated platforms, and unique branding. *Transit Tomorrow* recommended studying the Gorham-Westbrook-Portland corridor and using the study to determine the best mode for the region. Research has shown that the study will cost approximately \$70,000/mile, which means \$800,000 for the 11.5-mile Gorham to Portland corridor. The study will identify potential funding sources and strategies. The request for proposals (RFP) will be finalized in June, reviewed by stakeholders and the Policy Board in July, and published in August.

Nell asked for public comment and Greg Jordan of Greater Portland METRO expressed his support for the planning study, commenting that the advancement of Priority 3 (innovation) is important for bringing ridership back, even if it may take many years. He added that the rapid transit study works in tandem with the Transit Together study, which assesses the current local network.

Jean Sideris asked how biking and walking and the potential Portland bike share program will be incorporated; Chris responded the study will look at accessibility to any proposed stops or stations. Nell added that the Portland bike share program will hopefully launch next summer.

Tom Milligan expressed concern that the case studies used in scoping the study were large metropolitan areas. He voiced support for the planning effort, but hoped the study would have two phases, with the first phase to establish the need for rapid transit.

Christian added that the grant funding examples shown are generally won by larger regions with more ridership. He also pointed out that the Maine Turnpike Authority is planning a freeway expansion in the same area. And he asked if cities have expressed a willingness to provide local match funding. Chris said cities have not agreed to a local match, but noted that local match can come from municipalities, the state, or private funds. Chris added that PACTS will be taking the rapid transit presentation to the Turnpike shortly.

Patricia, while agreeing this is an important initiative, expressed concern about using CARES funds when there are labor shortages **and other concerns, plus millions of dollars' worth of deferred projects** in the FYCOP (Five-Year Capital and Operations Plan). She suggested taking a holistic view, matching the right funding with the right opportunities. CARES funding does not require a local match and could be used for projects that would have an immediate impact on riders and the region. There are other innovative things that could restore ridership such as ensuring schedules match, wayfinding, etc. She also expressed concern about embarking on a bold new project using one-time funding with no local match requirement when buy-in is so important. She suggested a match commitment for the planning effort to ensure a commitment going forward.

Nell asked staff to talk more about innovation funding going forward. She said her understanding was that this rapid transit study was scoped in Phase III with the understanding that the funding for the actual project would come in Phase IV.

Kristina explained that, for Phases V and VI, any CARES funding not needed for Priority 1 (maintaining regional transit service) will go through the Transportation Funding Framework. There was not enough time to do a call for projects for Phase IV, but, as explained in the aforementioned April 7 memo, there will be a call for projects for Phases V and VI, open to all transit agencies, board, municipalities, etc., for ways to innovate and build long-term ridership in the region. The rapid transit study is moving forward because \$25,000 was allocated in Phase III with the expectation that Phase IV would most likely be funded. GPCOG hired Colin Burch on that assumption and moved forward with scoping the study. This study is an opportunity to start planning on something that is key to implementing *Transit Tomorrow*. This rapid transit study is different from the next item, the AV shuttle pilot, because rapid transit was vetted through a regional process and the initial funding was a down payment on future funding.

Regarding Patricia's question, staff is putting together a comprehensive analysis that shows regular formula funds, the unfunded priorities for discretionary funding, ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funding, and remaining CARES funding, so we can look at matching the best funding with the best investments. We have been thinking comprehensively for a while, but we do not want to postpone rapid transit because we have someone on staff, we have momentum, we are ready to issue an RFP, and the project had a lot of support during previous CARES discussions before the committee restructuring.

Patricia reiterated that the local match is important and said we could consider funding the rapid transit study with the understanding that there would be some level of match from somebody, to demonstrate financial commitment. Christian suggested the Maine Turnpike Authority.

Donna **echoed Tom Milligan's concern about using larger metropolitan areas** as case studies. She said she is not opposed to this planning project, but is concerned about balancing priorities. The purpose of CARES funding is to get transit back to full service. She asked if we are funding priorities that help in the near time or a decade from now.

Eamonn expressed his support for the project, acknowledging the concerns about the funding source. He said implicit in the approval of *Transit Tomorrow* was that work would start immediately where possible and the plan would not sit on the shelf. This is a good opportunity to keep the momentum going. Getting the planning done now is good for potential discretionary opportunities in the future. There are a lot of guarantees for operations and maintenance funding in the funding framework.

Mireille explained that, currently, people who use public transportation to get to work or school do not know if they will be on time. Implementing *Transit Tomorrow* and rapid transit can improve transit and therefore help people trust and use transit. Improving transportation helps the community.

Christian MilNeil moved to recommend approval of \$800,000 in CARES IV funding for a rapid transit study; Eamonn Dundon seconded. All were in favor, though a few expressed reservations.

7. Autonomous Vehicle (AV) Shuttle Pilot – CARES Phase IV, Priority 3

The *Autonomous Vehicle (AV) Shuttle Pilot – CARES Phase IV, Priority 3* is the third of three CARES Act federal transit funding items on the agenda. This item is about funding being allocated in Phase IV (July-December 2021) under Priority 3 (innovation).

Like the rapid transit study, the AV shuttle pilot was discussed in late 2020 at the PACTS Transit Committee and Executive Committee and the decision was made to wait and consider the AV shuttle pilot in Phase IV (July-December 2021). The request is for 65% of the project cost. Greater Portland METRO is the project sponsor and the City of Portland and the University of Maine are partners.

Greg Jordan of Greater Portland METRO presented the project. It is an AV transit shuttle pilot/demonstration project. It is a knowledge and capacity building project that will allow us to add to the national discussion. It is not a mobility project that will generate ridership right now; it is setting us up for the future.

Nell asked for public comment and Nicholas Giudice, University of Maine (UMaine) professor and chief research scientist at the Virtual Environment and Multimodal Interaction (VEMI) Laboratory, **commented on UMaine's role.** He said AVs have enormous potential for improving independence and quality of life for underrepresented and high-risk drivers, like older adults. Maine has the oldest median population in the country. AVs also have benefits for people with visual impairments and physical, motor, and cognitive disabilities, many of which co-exist with aging. AV design is not currently considering these **populations in development and implementation. The goal of UMaine's study is to** make AVs successful for these groups. The research will include talking with and surveying riders to assess feelings, comfort level, usability, and ideas for improvement, and comparing them with METRO riders as a control group. UMaine will also run a series of behavioral studies in the lab using a simulated AV in virtual reality. The design of this pilot study makes it the first of its kind in the country.

Christian expressed strong disapproval, stating that autonomous vehicles do not exist because every AV currently requires a human driver to frequently intervene. He said this is not a practical expenditure when we have people with disabilities who need better, accessible bus service. We do not need to duplicate the efforts of others testing similar pilots. This was not a priority in *Transit Tomorrow*. The pilot would serve a tourist destination and neglect riders who rely on transit.

Jean Sideris expressed concern about the lack of attention to the safety of people outside the AV, noting the woman who was killed by an AV in Arizona. The vision test—being able to identify people, particularly outside of crosswalks—is a major gap in AV research. This study seems more focused on **people's opinions than safety.** Many people walk outside crosswalks in the location where the AV will be tested. Jean said she would not be comfortable with the project without additions to improve the safety of people outside the AV.

Greg said there would always be a trained operator onboard and, if the project goes forward, there would be a robust safety plan in place. Also, the vehicle is designed to be low speed, unlike the example in Arizona. **Greg commented that Christian's points are valid. This is a capacity and** knowledge building project for the future, not something that will have a long-term impact on mobility or generate ridership.

Tom Reinauer expressed concern about a team proposing the project as opposed to going out to bid and getting proposals. He also asked if there had been discussions with MaineDOT about the signal infrastructure involved in the project. Greg said the team was started by the City of Portland. Nell speculated that the funding used initially did not have the procurement requirements that many other funding sources have. Neither Greg nor Nell knew if DOT had been involved, but Nell said the city would follow the appropriate processes for any signal work.

Christian said he went to a city meeting five or six years ago at which attendees were assured there would be no public subsidy for this project. He reiterated his disapproval and said the project is not going to serve a transit function.

Nell reminded the committee that this project was advanced prior to RTAC's formation, so RTAC is seeing it out. There will be a call for projects in Phases V and VI.

Rebecca asked if prior PACTS boards voted to move this project ahead and Chris Chop said prior committees were briefed on it, but there was no vote. The decision was to discuss it for Phase IV.

Kristina pointed out that if the AV shuttle pilot does not move forward today, it could go through the call for projects and be scored against other projects. Rapid transit is a clearer decision because there was a regional process, but there was not a similar regional process for the AV shuttle.

Christian made a motion to advance a competitive call for innovative proposals for ideas to build back ridership and improve our existing transit system, calling for a range of ideas of which this project could be one.

Nell suggested first dealing with the project at hand to give the Executive Board some sense of the **committee's advice. Eamonn Dundon made a motion to recommend approval of \$650,000 in CARES IV** funding for a pilot project to test an AV shuttle; Tom Reinauer seconded. Five voted in favor, four voted against (Amanda Lessard, Adam Bliss, Jean Sideris, Christian MilNeil), and two abstained (Tom Reinauer, Mireille Kabongo). The motion carried, as attendance by 10 RTAC members constitutes a quorum.

After some discussion and clarification that Phase IV refers to the time period from July to December 2021, **it was determined that Christian's earlier motion was moot. There will be a call for innovation** projects for CARES funding in Phases V and VI.

In response to a comment by Theo Holtwijk, Chris explained that staff had not vetted the AV shuttle pilot. The project was brought to the PACTS committees in late 2020 during Phase III discussions and was deferred to today. Theo requested that staff vet items before including them on the agenda and that staff include recommendations.

Staff explained that if CARES Act fund is not granted to the AV shuttle pilot, it can be expended in later phases. The money has not been allocated and therefore does not need to be reallocated to later phases.

8. Allocation of FHWA Funds for Complex Projects

Postponed until the July RTAC meeting.

9. Other Business

The was no other business discussed.

10. Adjourn

With no objection, the meeting was adjourned.