

PACTS Policy Board

June 27, 2023

9:00–11:00 am

Meeting Minutes

Municipal Members		
Arundel	VACANT	
Biddeford	Jim Bennett	✓
Cape Elizabeth	Matt Sturgis	✓
Cumberland	Bill Shane	✓
Falmouth	Hope Cahan, chair	✓
Freeport	Jake Daniele	✓
Gorham	Ephrem Paraschak	
North Yarmouth	Diane Barnes	✓
Old Orchard Beach	Diana Asanza	
Portland	Keith Gray	✓
Portland	Kevin Kraft	✓
Raymond	Nathan White	
Saco	Patrick Fox, vice chair	✓
Scarborough	Angela Blanchette	
South Portland	Kate Lewis	
Standish	VACANT	
Westbrook	Eric Dudley	✓
Windham	Bob Burns	✓
Yarmouth	Scott LaFlamme	✓

Non-municipal Members		
MaineDOT	Dale Doughty	✓
Maine Turnpike Auth.	Erin Courtney	✓
Active Transp. Specialist	Kara Wooldrik	
Environmental Specialist	Allen Armstrong	
Transp. Equity Specialist	Andrew Blunt	
Transp. Equity Specialist	Yura Yasui	
RTAC Liaison	Tom Milligan	✓
BSOOB Transit	Chad Heid	✓
Casco Bay Lines	Hank Berg	✓
GP Metro	Greg Jordan	✓
NNEPRA	William Gayle	✓
Reg. Transp. Program	Jack DeBeradinis	
So. Portland Bus Serv.	Donna Tippet	✓
York Co. Comm. Action	Tom Reinauer	✓

Non-voting Members		
SMPDC	Stephanie Carver	✓
Federal Highway Admin.	Paige Melius	
Federal Transit Admin.	Leah Sirmin	

1. Welcome

Hope Cahan opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Approval of the May 23 Policy Board Meeting Minutes

Jim Bennett moved to approve the May 23 meeting minutes as written; Patrick Fox seconded. All were in favor. 3 members abstained. (Weighted vote: 42–0; standard vote: 13–0)¹

4. Chair's Report

Ron Landis has become the new GPCOG staff lead for the PACTS Policy and Executive Boards.

5. Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) Report

Tom Milligan reported that members of the Community Transportation Leaders program presented opportunities for the transit operators in the PACTS region to make the transportation system more accessible for all users.

6. Staff Report

The recent 2020 Census has impacts on the PACTS Urbanized Area, specifically, its boundaries. GPCOG staff will be hosting meetings with municipal staff from each of the PACTS subregions and utilize their input to inform the Policy Board's decision. A newly defined PACTS Urbanized Area is expected to be considered by the Policy Board this summer.

MaineDOT is seeking feedback on its Carbon Reduction Strategy. The public comment period is open through July 31. FHWA is seeking feedback on its Equity Plan.

Ron Landis is the new GPCOG staff lead for PACTS Policy and Executive Boards. Staff thanks Andrew Clark for his former contributions in leading the PACTS Policy and Executive Boards.

7. Overview of the Transportation Improvement Program

Staff provided a detailed overview of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), including project selection, collaboration between MaineDOT and PACTS, and aligning the region's planning work with its investments.

Public Comment

None.

Board Discussion

¹ Per PACTS Bylaws, Policy Board votes are weighted by municipal population.

Dale Doughty emphasized the importance of collaboration between MaineDOT and PACTS in their long-range planning and project development efforts. Dale also emphasized the importance of preliminary scoping work for municipalities who anticipate collaborating with MaineDOT. These details will further be established in the forthcoming Memorandum of Agreement between MaineDOT and PACTS.

Hope Cahan commended MaineDOT in providing additional details related to the North Windham Moves project in response to questions raised by the Policy Board at the May 23 meeting. Dale added the importance of collaboration between PACTS, the member communities, and MaineDOT and encouraged the different parties to discuss project details when the situation arises. Dale also recognized that all parties should have a good sense of why projects are selected and where they are in the project development process. He stressed the importance of acting quickly with respect to funding opportunities and asserted that MaineDOT is committed to working with PACTS and definitely committed to trying to bring substantial funding to the PACTS area that is not in the ordinary routine.

Jim Bennett emphasized the importance of PACTS member communities positioning themselves to prepare for discretionary funding opportunities and how PACTS could pilot an opportunity for PACTS members to submit projects to be considered for discretionary funding. Bill Shane added to Jim Bennett's point by asking Chris Chop how PACTS can play a role in obtaining discretionary funds for its member communities. Chris Chop, GPCOG staff, highlighted GPCOG's advocacy efforts as one important piece. He also mentioned how limited formula funding makes it challenging to "get projects ready", but cited a few recent examples (Biddeford Elm Street, Saco Island Multimodal Bridge) where PACTS' funding commitments help initiate preliminary design, thus making them more competitive for discretionary grant opportunities. He also highlighted the importance of project scoping through planning studies (e.g., those funding through PACTS' Unified Planning Work Program, MaineDOT initiatives) so we are ready for opportunities. Jim Bennett suggested that PACTS adopt a system of issuing a Call for Projects under the PACTS Complex Projects Program biennially, and adding a Call for Projects to develop a list of projects in the region ready for discretionary funding during the odd years. Chris Chop suggested the Fiscally Constrained Project list from Connect 2045 as a starting point. Dale Doughty added that a list of projects in the PACTS region ready for discretionary funding could also be eligible for MaineDOT funding programs, such as the Village Partnership Initiative.

Bill Shane applauded MaineDOT's bridge program and asked how PACTS could take on a more developed role in bridge reconstruction projects within the region. Dale Doughty added that PACTS' member communities will be asked to submit feedback on forthcoming bridge projects within their municipality.

8. TIP Amendment – North Windham Moves

Public Comment

None.

Board Discussion

None.

Motion

Jim Bennett moved to approve the TIP amendment (WIN 026662.00) for the North Windham Moves project; Bob Burns seconded. All were in favor. (Weighted vote: 54–0; standard vote: 20–0)

9. Project Update: Gorham-Westbrook-Portland Rapid Transit Study

Staff gave an update on the Gorham-Westbrook-Portland Rapid Transit Study, which is being developed as a result of the region's long-range transit plan, *Transit Tomorrow*, to investigate the opportunity to invest in rapid transit in the region. The project team is currently examining the viability of four alternative alignments that would connect Gorham, Westbrook, and Portland.

Public Comment

None.

Board Discussion

Bill Shane questioned whether dedicated bus lanes could also be used by cyclists. Andrew Clark, GPCOG staff, noted that the project team is considering that as a possibility.

Dale Doughty expressed support in assisting GPCOG/PACTS staff with identifying potential federal funding sources for implementing rapid transit in the region. Dale Doughty added that MaineDOT is supportive of PACTS pursuing rapid transit in the region.

Greg Jordan noted that the alternatives being studied for rapid transit emulate the current Greater Portland Metro *Husky Line* and can be leveraged in discussions surrounding the viability of the project.

Chad Heid questioned the frequency of each alternative route and the capacity of the service, specifically at the University of Southern Maine campus in Gorham. Andrew Clark answered by stating that the project team is currently modeling 15 to 20-minute frequencies and the team is also evaluating the possibility of using 60-foot articulated buses during peak capacity runs. Chad Heid followed up with a question about an increase in ridership because of rapid transit and when an increase in ridership might be expected. Andrew Clark noted that future population estimates for the region identified in the region's long-range transportation plan, *Connect 2045*, are submitted to the Federal Transit Administration to ensure modeling is fact-based.

Erin Courtney questioned the possibility of right-of-way impacts and how that might affect the viability of the project moving forward. Andrew Clark noted that analysis at this stage has been high-level and right-of-way impacts will not be evaluated under this tier of the project.

10. Call for Projects Strategy and Discussion

Staff presented an overview of the Complex Projects funding program, including a new preliminary Horizontal Vertical Alignment Complete (HVAC) requirement for applicants during the Fall 2023 Call for Projects. Some member municipalities indicated that they needed additional time and or resources to be in alignment with the new preliminary HVAC requirement. Staff presented several alternatives to holding a traditional Call for Projects in the fall and recommended that the board direct staff not to issue a call for new complex projects in the Fall of 2023.

Public Comment

None.

Board Discussion

Jim Bennett expressed interest in tasking staff to pilot a program for the fall of 2023 that would replace the typical Fall 2023 Call for Projects with a program designed to target large federal discretionary grant opportunities for municipal projects based on a list of projects submitted by the member municipalities. Jim added that staff could design the parameters of the program and bring back their findings to the Policy Board. He mentioned the possibility of pursuing this new program on a biennial basis, perhaps alternating years with a biennial “call for Complex Projects”, Chris Chop noted that the Complex Projects program is very resource intensive and appreciated the suggestion from Jim Bennett. Jim Bennett added that the program for identifying projects to target discretionary grant opportunities could include new projects or projects in the Complex Projects “pipeline” that have already received partial funding.

Keith Gray provided an update to three PACTS-funded projects underway in Portland. The Brighton Avenue project is undergoing a scope change due to a potential conflict with the alignments prepared in the rapid transit study. The Libbytown project is also underway, collaborating with MaineDOT. The Forest Avenue project is working through scoping challenges related to the rapid transit study.

Patrick Fox supported Jim Bennett’s proposal and added that the projects be vetted by the appropriate PACTS subregion during a meeting and the projects submitted to the new program be scored to determine sequencing. Dale Doughty added that once the highest scoring projects are determined under the proposed program, PACTS staff and MaineDOT should work together to determine what level of scoping is appropriate for each project.

Motion

Jim Bennett moved to ask staff to develop a program (replacing the Fall 2023 Call for Projects this year) to evaluate projects and to encourage input from PACTS communities that would help position the region for outside federal resources; Keith Gray seconded. Jim Bennett added that the proposed program would allow municipalities to submit projects for consideration before being scored and that the proposed program developed by staff be brought back to the appropriate PACTS governing body for approval. Chris Chop asked how the proposed program might interact with Fiscally Constrained Project list from *Connect 2045*. Jim Bennett added that staff can advise the Board on this specific point as a part of the program's development. Bill Shane supported Patrick Fox's suggestion of providing a subregional approach to developing projects for consideration. Dale Doughty added that MaineDOT will work with PACTS to design an opportunity to scope the projects being considered in this proposed program appropriately. All were in favor. (Weighted vote: 44–0; standard vote: 15–0)

11. Other Business

None.

12. Adjourn

With no objection, the meeting was adjourned.