

PACTS Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC)

November 14, 2023

9:00 a.m.

Approved Meeting Minutes

Seat	Representative	Attendance
PACTS Southern – Municipal	Diana Asanza	Y
PACTS Southern – Planning/ Economic Development	Emily Cole-Prescott	
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	Melissa Hutchins	Y
PACTS Western – Municipal	Bob Burns	
PACTS Western – Planning/ Economic Development	Amanda Lessard	Y
PACTS Western – Public Works/ Engineering	Katherine Kelley	Y
PACTS Northern – Municipal	Nathan Poore	Y
PACTS Northern – Planning/ Economic Development	Erin Zwirko, chair	Y
PACTS Northern – Public Works/ Engineering	Adam Bliss	Y
Transit	Hank Berg	Y
Transit	Catherine Davidson	Y
Transit	Tom Reinauer	Y
Transit	Chad Heid, vice chair	Y
MaineDOT	Dale Doughty	Y
Maine Turnpike Authority	Rebecca Grover	Y
Active Transportation Specialist	Jason Day	Y
Environmental Specialist	Christian MilNeil	Y
Community Transportation Leader	Guy Mpoyi	
Community Transportation Leader	Cheryl Oldfield	Y
Private Sector Trade Association	Eamonn Dundon	Y

1. Welcome

Erin Zwirko opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

2. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

3. Approval of the October 3, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Eamonn Dundon moved to approve the October 3, 2023 meeting minutes as written; Christian MilNeil seconded. Hank Berg, Adam Bliss, Catherine Davidson, Jason Day, Dale Doughty, Cheryl Oldfield, Nathan Poore, and Tom Reinauer abstained. All other members present were in favor. (Vote: 9-0-8)

4. Staff Report

The 2024 PACTS meeting calendar has been published online and is also in the meeting packet. Calendar invites for committee members will follow.

The 2024-2025 Unified Work Planning Work Program (UPWP) was approved by the Policy Board on October 26, with additional public comments supporting the Regional Trail Plan. The Policy Board approved the draft budget but directed staff to proportionately adjust project-level budgets if final budgets are within 6% of the \$3.78 million anticipated.

The project team is zeroing in on a preferred alternative for the Gorham-Westbrook Rapid Transit Study. The METRO Board has endorsed the alternative, which runs from Gorham to Westbrook on Route 25, Brighton Avenue, then connects via Congress Street to Ocean Gateway in Portland. The team is working with the communities, MaineDOT, and other stakeholders to finalize the preferred alternative, after which the team will apply for federal discretionary grants with METRO as the project sponsor.

A couple of months ago, the City of Portland requested that the Brighton Avenue corridor project be rescoped to a more discrete intersection project with a focus on transforming the Rosemont Corner on Brighton Avenue to a roundabout. PACTS has been meeting with MaineDOT, who indicated that a TIP (Transportation Improvement Program) amendment will not be needed; however, PACTS staff are working to restructure the agreement between PACTS, the City of Portland, and MaineDOT. Additional studies are needed before any final determinations are made on the intersection.

The Policy Board voted to cancel the Call for Transit System Enhancement Projects for this year.

Public Comment

None.

Committee Discussion

None.

5. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with MaineDOT

PACTS, the state's largest Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and only Transportation Management Area (TMA), and the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) are tasked with cooperatively determining their mutual responsibilities in carrying out the metropolitan transportation process. In the past, PACTS has expressed a desire to plan more holistically with MaineDOT for our region's transportation system, helping ensure all transportation investments in the region advance regional goals and priorities for the benefit of the public. MaineDOT has also acknowledged the limitations of the existing funding and decision-making process, and has drafted a [Cooperative Planning Proposal](#). The proposal, when fully developed, will likely change the relationship between the MPOs and MaineDOT. GPCOG staff reviewed MaineDOT's proposal and developed a [preliminary analysis](#) which raises questions about how things will change and how the agreement will be implemented, and begins to identify proposed changes and solutions.

Chris Chop (GPCOG staff) presented on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) being developed, noting the discussion is focused on Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funds and not Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds, though it is possible to transfer FHWA funding for transit uses. Chris explained one reason we need to change the relationship between PACTS and MaineDOT is to better comply with federal law. Federal law states that the PACTS Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), a four-year investment program for federally funded transportation projects, should be developed *by the MPO* in cooperation with the State; that it should reflect the investment *priorities established in*

the metropolitan transportation plan (Connect 2045); that it should provide a clear financial plan; and—since PACTS is an MPO that serves a Transportation Management Area (TMA)—that projects should be *selected by PACTS* or, if on the national highway system, by the State *in cooperation with PACTS*.

Kristina Egan (GPCOG staff) explained that, in addition to complying with federal law, we need to change the relationship in response to input from MaineDOT and PACTS members. MaineDOT has expressed it feels it underinvests in our region, that it wants local requests to go through a regional process, and that it wants the region to be more proactive and quicker in getting projects ready for federal discretionary opportunities. PACTS members have said our region needs its fair share of funding, and that PACTS' plans should match its investments.

Kristina described some of the challenges with the current system, but expressed hope that a new agreement could play to PACTS' and MaineDOT's respective strengths. MaineDOT is great at forecasting asset management needs and managing construction projects, particularly bridges and roads, and has the federal money and the state funds to help with local match. PACTS is great at planning; has a regional perspective focused on outcomes such as climate, equity, mobility, and economic development from investments; is a forum for all cities & towns and sets the table for many voices and provide a forum for broad discussions about priorities that are outcome oriented; and is great at engaging the public with its communications and engagement team.

Kristina said the goal that could be achieved through the new agreement is to have PACTS develop plans and prioritize projects that MaineDOT makes real through investments. She then described the key elements to achieving this goal.

Chris Chop provided a comparison of the process today versus the envisioned process under the new MOU, explaining the roles of and interaction between the long-range transportation plan (Connect 2045), the PACTS Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the MaineDOT Work Plan, and the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

Dale Doughty (MaineDOT) provided a brief overview of MaineDOT's proposal, noting he saw a lot of alignment between PACTS' and MaineDOT's goals, and reiterating interest in a collaborative and holistic approach to addressing the region's transportation needs, and having each agency focus on its respective strengths.

[GPCOG's presentation slide deck on the MOU](#)
[MaineDOT's presentation slide deck on the MOU](#)

Public Comment

None.

Committee Discussion

Nathan Poore (Northern Subregion) noted that if PACTS is more involved with funding more projects, PACTS will need to be able respond quickly when scope changes are necessary, e.g., when a culvert needs to be replaced. Dale Doughty (MaineDOT) responded that he would appreciate additional input on PACTS' involvement in state-funded transportation projects in the PACTS region. On the one hand, it's state-only money; on the other hand, MaineDOT is seeking additional PACTS influence in the Work Plan, which includes federal- and state-funded projects.

In response to a question regarding the term for the MOU, Dale described it as a long-term document that will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

Tom Milligan (Southern Subregion) expressed that there is never enough funding, so, while we will need to maintain our assets, we will also need to remain focused on including sidewalks and similar infrastructure. Increasing roadway capacity will not be the solution.

Kristina Egan (GPCOG staff) requested that MaineDOT provide clarity and predictability regarding how it will invest state dollars, particularly for projects that do more than improve vehicle throughput. Dale noted that MaineDOT is currently updating its match policy and its complete streets policy.

Adam Bliss (Northern Subregion) requested that staff share the information about the MOU with other PACTS committees, such as the Collector Paving Working Group. Adam also asked what would become of the PACTS Municipal Partnership Initiative (MPI) and PACTS Collector Paving Program, and what would happen with projects that have been selected through 2026. Dale responded that PACTS has already received its 2026 allocation, so those projects will remain. He added that collector paving is a regional decision, so PACTS will submit a list of candidates to MaineDOT and MaineDOT will fund as far down the list as it can.

Kristina noted that project categories may become less important once we are working together on the Work Plan and on how the full ~\$60 million is spent in the PACTS region each year.¹ She added that PACTS should be using plans to select project priorities, and MaineDOT can help with readiness. Dale agreed but noted that collector paving would likely be more asset-driven than plan-driven.

Nell Donaldson (Central Subregion) wondered how we will cement the link between the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the MaineDOT Work Plan, and Connect 2045. She expressed concern about becoming too reliant on discretionary funding and said part of the ~\$60 million should be for transformative projects.

Nell also noted that coordination on project delivery has been a stumbling block, and the MOU should help clarify how that coordination is carried out.

Eamonn Dundon (Private Sector Trade Association) requested that PACTS staff explain at a future meeting how current processes such as PACTS Transportation Funding Framework will fit into MaineDOT's proposed initiatives.

Christian MilNeil (Environmental Specialist) said it will be important for us to include our goals (e.g., Vision Zero, Maine Won't Wait) in the MOU. He also noted that fiscal constraint is important. Fuel tax revenue is declining, and Maine already has the highest fuel tax rate in New England. He also expressed there is a need for MaineDOT to be more disciplined about scope creep.

Rebecca Grover (Maine Turnpike Authority) asked about the timeline and Kristina offered that GPCOG staff could begin drafting language for the MOU. Dale replied that that would be helpful. Kristina added that PACTS should have an MOU separate from the other MPOs, since it is the only MPO in Maine that serves a Transportation Management Area (TMA).

Tom Milligan said he hoped that existing projects would be woven in as the first step.

Motion

¹ MaineDOT estimates that the Department invests approximately \$60 million per year in the PACTS region, noting that the estimate is based on a limited sample size of prior investments. The actual future funding level (and process for determining the funding) is to-be-determined and staff are hopeful that the amount will exceed \$60 million as MaineDOT has previously stated that it underinvests in the region.

Christian moved staff's recommended action, with the incorporation of the federal responsibilities PACTS has, as a TMA, to engage in the development of the TIP and to evaluate its alignment with regional goals. Tom Milligan seconded the motion. All voted in favor. (Vote: 19-0-0)

6. Update on Transit Funding Process

The PACTS process to develop the Five-Year Capital and Operations Plan (FYCOP) is currently ad-hoc in nature, and based on projected transit agency needs. PACTS' Transportation Funding Framework, which was adopted in April 2021, requires the development and implementation of a "criteria-based process for allocating operating funds." Since federal law requires a performance-based approach, staff are working with the transit agencies and federal partners to develop a funding suballocation process that is better aligned with federal law, national best practice, and regional policy direction, to be implemented in 2024.

Andrew Clark (GPCOG staff) reported that the Transit Task Force will be meeting in December for a dedicated workshop to develop the annual allocation of the four funding streams from the Federal Transit Administration. Staff will return to RTAC for additional feedback in January.

[GPCOG's presentation slide deck on the Transit Funding Process](#)

Public Comment

None.

Committee Discussion

Chad Heid (Transit Representative) requested clarification about compliance with federal law related to a performance-based approach, expressed concerns about the need to explicitly define goals such as incentivizing efficient service, and questioned the feasibility of completing this amount of work by March 2024. He noted there are seven agencies in the Transit Task Force and suggested that a memorandum of understanding be drafted so the process doesn't have to be revisited every year.

Andrew noted that the Transit Task Force has only outlined the framework and will be working on the details in the coming months. He agreed that the March deadline is optimistic but we will know more after the December workshop. He also explained that PACTS, during its regular certification review by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), received recommendations for improving performance-based planning and programming.

Chad requested that staff provide further detail on the Federal Transit Authority's recommendations.

Hank Berg (Transit Representative) stated that the performance-based approach works well for common modes of transportation but is challenging for different modes of transportation. Casco Bay Lines and Amtrak have different priorities and metrics they are trying to achieve.

Christian MilNeil (Environmental Specialist) suggested that MaineDOT be involved in the process, noting promises made in the *Maine Won't Wait* plan to increase state support for transit.

Eamonn Dundon (Private Sector Trade Association) cautioned against selecting metrics that merely back into the status quo.

Kristina Egan (GPCOG staff) asked when the public would have the opportunity to weigh in on the metrics. Andrew replied that all Transit Task Force meetings, including the December workshop, are public.

7. Ride With Me Event

GPCOG and PACTS are hosting the *Ride With Me* event to educate decision-makers about transportation barriers experienced by older adults, people with disabilities, people of color, and individuals with lower incomes. The *Ride With Me* event is planned for January and February 2024.

This event grew out of a Community Transportation Leaders (CTL) presentation to the PACTS Executive Committee in 2020. It was suggested that decision-makers ride with Community Transportation Leaders from a specific start point (origin) to a specific end point (destination) to experience the challenges and barriers that people who depend on public transportation face.

The first *Ride With Me* event was held in 2022. Decision-makers who participated in the event included transit agencies representatives, elected officials, municipal staff members, and other PACTS board and committee members. Participants expressed that they benefited from the event and would like to see the event hosted annually or more frequently.

Kristina Egan (GPCOG staff) added that many of the folks committee members will ride with during this event have been trained as CTLs, and they can gain a better understanding of how transportation decisions are made, and how to proactively and constructively advocate for people who have different kinds of challenges with the system.

Marcel Ntagora (GPCOG staff) will send a recruitment email to committee members. Those who are interested in joining the event can respond to Marcel.

[GPCOG's presentation slide deck on Ride With Me](#)

Public Comment

None.

Committee Discussion

Chad Heid (Transit Representative) encouraged everyone to sign up for this event. It will give committee members the opportunity to briefly live the experience of others who rely on our public transportation network.

Chrisitan MilNeil (Environmental Specialist) suggested that members encourage their elected officials and other colleagues to participate as well.

Erin Zwirko (Northern Subregion) added that colleagues in members' towns or city halls or other agencies such as transit board members should also be invited.

8. Adjourn

With no objections, the meeting was adjourned.