



Operating with Excellence & Leading the Region

Recommendations for PACTS

**Prepared for: PACTS Policy Committee and
PACTS Executive Committee**

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Final Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PACTS Policy Committee and Executive Committee recently finished a short process to identify current issues in the way PACTS operates and how PACTS can enhance its regional leadership. The process also included the development of possible solutions to address the challenges. Staff has developed the following recommendations for PACTS to consider:

Operate with Excellence

- 1. Strengthen Relationships.** Developing and maintaining strong relationships with state and federal partners is critical for PACTS to succeed. A strong relationship requires PACTS to understand state and federal requirements, PACTS needs to meet deadlines, and PACTS needs to communicate with consistency and clarity.
- 2. Allocate Funds with Consistency.** PACTS is responsible for consistently allocating funds to its members for both capital and planning projects. Fair allocation of funds across all modes in the entire region can be accomplished by reconvening the Transportation Improvement Program Process and Procedures committee and with the development of a TIP application guide.
- 3. Manage Projects Actively.** Actively managing projects gives PACTS the opportunity to ensure important projects in our region are being delivered on time and on budget. A project development guide will be useful to track the development and schedule of projects. The Executive Committee will be engaged on PACTS projects with staff providing monthly project status reports.
- 4. Reform Committees.** PACTS committees need to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The development of committee mission statements will reduce the overlap we experience among some of our committees. Changing the time and location of the Policy committee meetings will make it more convenient for electeds to participate.

Lead the Region

- 1. Lead The Region.** PACTS needs to be a transportation leader in the region. To do that, PACTS needs to set clear priorities, communicate priorities to members and to the public. There are several communication outlets PACTS will use to disseminate information.
- 2. Plan for the Future.** PACTS' long-range plans need to be developed with a purpose and anticipate changing trends across multiple areas. Strong long-range plans are frequently assessed and adjusted based on the need and priorities of the region. PACTS will conduct a self-assessment of *Destination 2040* and will stay current on rapidly changing technologies and trends in transportation.
- 3. Set Regional Priorities.** Setting regional priorities ensures that we are all rowing in the same direction, gives PACTS' members a common goal to achieve, and creates a

strong transportation network. To effectively set regional goals PACTS needs to link funding to priorities, educate members on regional projects, and generate a project list which demonstrates the needs of the region.

- 4. Engage the Public.** Broad public engagement will result in effective projects and plans. PACTS needs to develop clear messages to communicate with the public on a variety of platforms. PACTS needs to consistently update its public participation plans to engage the underrepresented population.

INTRODUCTION

In March 2018, the PACTS Executive Committee decided to undertake a short process to identify ways to improve PACTS' performance. The recent integration of PACTS and GPCOG in January and the February hire of a new Transportation Director provided an opportunity to set new priorities and identify issues and challenges with the way PACTS operates and establishes priorities. Through a series of workshops with both the Executive Committee and the Policy Committee, members identified, prioritized and proposed solutions to challenges, as well as identified new opportunities for PACTS to lead the region. This document summarizes the process undertaken and the challenges and solutions identified. From this work, staff has developed draft recommendations for PACTS members' consideration.

Over the course of the past 4 months, both PACTS Executive and Policy committees met to identify the issues and challenges with the way PACTS operates and sets priorities. The initial meeting was with the PACTS Executive Committee, which focused on two major questions: (1) What do members want to see PACTS accomplish in the next year? and (2) What changes would members like to see in how PACTS functions? Several themes emerged from the initial workshop with the Executive Committee. Staff organized the themes and shared them with the Policy Committee for feedback. The Policy Committee provided thoughtful feedback, helping to expand the originally identified issues. Over the course of two subsequent meetings, the Executive Committee prioritized the issues and provided possible solutions. While facilitating these workshops, staff also drew from two previous organizational reviews done by The Resource Systems Group and Federal Highway Administration.

STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS

PACTS serves as the regional transportation planning and federal funding organization for the Greater Portland region. In order to succeed in that role, PACTS must maintain a strong working relationship with partners at both state and federal agencies. To cultivate strong relationships with the Maine Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Federal Transit Administration, PACTS needs to be well-versed in the federal requirements of the MPO and state

policies that influence MPO operations. The relationships, while improving, are not as strong as they need to be. PACTS has frequently requested extensions on Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) deadlines and, at times, does not meet other MaineDOT deadlines.

Understanding the rules of the game, having clear and consistent communication, and being the convener of MaineDOT meetings in the region, are all ways in which PACTS can strengthen its relationships with state and federal agencies. These outcomes will be achieved in the following ways:

- **Understand Requirements.** Staff will participate in quarterly conference calls with MaineDOT, FHWA and FTA on policy updates or proposed and pending changes. Staff will also participate in relevant webinars and trainings hosted by our federal and state partners.
- **Meet Deadlines.** Develop an annual calendar which identifies deadlines for federal and state required activities, along with a checklist for each activity. This will ease the committee approval process and reduce the risk of missing deadlines.
- **Communicate Clearly.** Along with clear consistent communication reflecting PACTS goals, staff host regular information sharing meetings with MaineDOT Region One's staff with the purpose of coordinating projects and planning efforts.
- **Learn from Others.** Regularly meet with other MPO directors in the region for the purpose of staying informed on best management practices for MPOs of a similar size to PACTS.

ALLOCATE FUNDS WITH CONSISTENCY

An important function of PACTS is to program the state and federally allocated funds. While the process for distributing funds can be complicated, PACTS has a responsibility to provide a fair and balanced approach to programming federal and state dollars. The process for allocating the limited funds needs to be consistent across all modes and all communities throughout the entire region and support the regional goals of the MPO.

Some members view the application process for both the Unified Planning Work Program and the Transportation Improvement Program as overly technical and time consuming. The process can be burdensome to municipalities without technical expertise on staff. As noted in the 2016 FHWA Transportation Planning Certification Review, PACTS should explore opportunities to provide technical assistance and expand outreach to those communities that are not fully engaged. Unlike the TIP, the

holding Work Identification Number (WIN) does not currently have a process for evaluating the distribution of excess funds held in that account.

Allocating funds based on the goals of the region will require PACTS to be a technical resource, develop fair and balanced scoring criteria, and coordinate projects in the region for efficiencies. To meet all of these goals PACTS should:

- **Convene TIP Process and Procedures Committee.** Reconvene the TIP Process and Procedures Committee with balanced representation, to revisit the TIP scoring criteria based on regional goals and PACTS' Long-Range Plan (*Destination 2040*). The updated scoring criteria need to balance the goals of equity, efficiency, performance and regional benefit. The committee will also develop recommendations on a procedure for allocating funds from the holding WIN.
- **Develop Application Guide.** Develop a TIP application guide which clearly outlines the criteria for a project. This should be developed by the TIP Process and Procedures Committee. It can include the scoring criteria by which applications will be evaluated. This guide can also include the top priorities for the region and examples of projects that align with those priorities.
- **Provide Technical Support.** Recently PACTS added a technical staff person, who can assist municipalities that are developing applications.
- **Monitor.** Create and update a database of unfunded municipal projects. This will allow staff to track potential efficiencies when projects are coordinated. This also provides an inventory of unfunded projects to utilize when funding opportunities present themselves, such as holding WIN funds and federal grants.

MANAGE PROJECTS ACTIVELY

Currently, PACTS does not design or construct capital projects. In most cases, once the project is funded, PACTS participation in the project fades. However, this approach needs to be rethought because PACTS projects are not being designed or constructed in reasonable timeframes. PACTS does not have a process for tracking how quickly we are designing and constructing projects. There is not a clear understanding of project development process or project “benchmarks”. There is not a system to ensure accountability for project delivery. The same is true of planning studies in the UPWP.

To take an active project management role in both capital and planning projects, PACTS needs to convene project partners, understand project milestones, monitor project progress and be an advocate for the project. To more actively manage projects, PACTS should:

- **Develop.** To successfully manage projects, staff needs to identify key partners for the project as well as the scope, schedule and budget for every project. Staff will develop a project development guide to be used for monitoring progress for each project.
- **Monitor.** Staff will create a project monitoring tool using the existing MaineDOT project report. Staff will monitor the milestones, developed as part of the project development process.
- **Communicate.** Staff will provide monthly updates to the PACTS Executive Committee. Updates will elevate for discussion, projects that are experiencing significant delays, and provide recommendations to address any outstanding issues.

REFORM COMMITTEES

As a result of PACTS becoming a Transportation Management Area (TMA), the PACTS Policy Committee was required to include elected officials in its membership. It is beneficial to have electeds involved in the PACTS process. As electeds become more educated on the transportation needs in the region, identifying funding sources to address those needs often becomes a priority. The 2012 RSG report recommended developing a “MPO 101” seminar for newly elected officials to educate them on the PACTS process, highlighting the role of cities and towns in the MPO and the benefits to their municipalities. Additionally, the RSG report recommended to schedule subcommittee meetings based on need rather than the calendar.

Throughout the workshops with membership this spring, there was discussion regarding PACTS having too many committees. Agendas could be more concise, and information shared in a timely manner. PACTS committees do not have clear missions, and in particular, the boundaries between the Executive Committee and Policy Committee are unclear. The Policy Committee spends too much time in the weeds, which likely drives away participation by elected officials. Meeting times are not convenient for elected officials that work. The governing bodies do not provide meaningful input on public transportation issues in the region, and there is inadequate engagement between the governing committees and the Transit Committee.

To establish high functioning committees, PACTS should:

- **Create Committee Missions.** PACTS should develop draft mission statements for each of the 5 PACTS standing committees (Policy, Executive, Technical, Planning and Transit). These mission statements will be based on PACTS priorities, the goals of *Destination 2040*, and the Regional Transit Plan.

- **Revise Meeting Times and Locations.** PACTS Policy will meet four times annually and PACTS Executive Committee will meet eight times annually. Establish a new time for the Policy Committee to meet which will be convenient for electeds to participate. The Policy Committee meetings will also rotate to different locations throughout the region. Staff will review the current bylaws, and make recommendations to better allow for flexibility in approvals to ensure that deadlines are met.
- **Re-structure.** Over the next year, staff will explore the potential of combining the Planning Committee and the Technical Committee into one unified Planning and Programing Committee.
- **Engage.** Focus outreach to the elected officials appointed to PACTS Policy to better engage them.

LEAD THE REGION

As the federal Metropolitan Planning Organization, PACTS is responsible for building and maintaining a strong transportation network. To do this, PACTS needs to know its priorities, communicate them to member communities, stakeholders and the public, and position itself to seize opportunities and address any and all challenges that stand in the way of achieving those priorities. In other words, PACTS needs to lead the region in achieving a strong transportation system for today and for tomorrow.

Currently, PACTS is not visible in the region as a leader in transportation. PACTS has not focused on providing tools and education to the public or decisionmakers in the region about transportation challenges and funding.

To address this challenge, PACTS needs to more clearly define its priorities, strengthen its capacity to educate its members and the public, and commit to regularly communicating information, both internally and externally. These actions will begin to brand PACTS as the region’s leader in transportation.

To achieve these outcomes, PACTS will:

- **Set Priorities.** Clarify a short list of 2019 priorities, adopted by the Executive Committee. Review progress on priorities once per quarter at Policy Committee meetings. This will contribute to ensuring higher level discussions at PACTS committee meetings. As part of these priorities, PACTS will consider embracing and advancing a significant project that can be a “win” for the region, and for PACTS.

- **Communicate Priorities to Members.** PACTS will annually hold subregional meetings for local electeds and staff with the purpose of educating on PACTS’ role and their community’s role in PACTS, presenting the region’s challenges and opportunities, soliciting feedback on priorities, and giving members the tools to be ambassadors for PACTS. To prepare, staff will work with managers to understand the best approach to presenting the material.

- **Communicate Priorities to the Public.** PACTS will use multiple communications vehicles and channels to communicate its priorities:
 - High level messaging: Staff will develop and present overarching messaging about transportation in our region to the Executive Committee.
 - Collateral development: PACTS needs easy-to-understand electronic and hard copy collateral. During the UPWP period, we will produce two things: a brochure and a transportation data dashboard. PACTS and GPCOG will jointly develop a brochure that describes who we are, what we’ve accomplished, and where we are going, based on the high level messaging. As part of GPCOG’s community profiles, we will develop an online transportation dashboard.
 - Website: Upgrade the look and feel, fix the search function, and improve the content of the current website.
 - Media relations: Keep the media informed about the MPO process and transportation issues in the region.
 - Social media: Launch a social presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat or Instagram.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

As part of its federal designation, PACTS is required to develop and periodically update a Metropolitan Transportation Plan, also known as a long range-plan. In 2016, PACTS conducted a complete update of its long-range plan, *Destination 2040*. The RSG report also recommended that PACTS prepare a “self-assessment” of progress made towards implementing the recommendations of *Destination 2040*. RSG identified two different approaches to conducting the assessment of the long-range plan. First, PACTS could conduct the assessment with staff and committees, as an internal review. The other option would be for PACTS to conduct the assessment with broader stakeholder input.

PACTS needs to plan with a purpose and ensure plans are programmatic. Long-range planning does not adequately anticipate changing trends in transportation at both the state and federal levels. In particular, as we craft our UPWP, program transportation funding, and update the long range plan, PACTS should consider how to address the rapidly graying population in Southern Maine, attract a younger workforce, take into account the possible growth in shared mobility, and think ahead for how our infrastructure and services can be prepared for autonomous vehicles and climate resiliency.

For PACTS to have a more meaningful long-range plan, PACTS needs to:

- **Conduct Self-Assessment.** PACTS will develop a process to conduct a self-assessment of *Destination 2040*. This process could result in annual adjustments to the plan.
- **Stay Current.** Staff will stay informed on rapidly changing trends and technologies and regularly bring research and speakers into PACTS meetings and dialogues. Those technologies include: Signals, Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), autonomous vehicles, and shared mobility.
- **Expand.** The Executive Committee will be engaged in the development of the Regional Transit Plan Phase 2. They will appoint a steering committee to lead the development of that plan.
- **Integration.** PACTS' long-range plan will integrate multiple sectors into one plan. The long-range plan will incorporate land-use, economic development, natural resources, and transportation, while addressing the needs of an aging population and attracting a younger workforce.

SET CLEAR REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Because PACTS is responsible for building and maintaining a strong transportation network, it needs to set regional priorities. To maximize limited funding and position the region to be eligible for discretionary funding, PACTS should develop a clear set of regional priorities. These priorities should directly reflect the short and long term goals of the region. With a clear set of priorities, PACTS can identify projects that will support those priorities.

Currently, PACTS does not have a back bench of shovel-ready projects, with the exception of collector paving projects. PACTS is not prepared to collectively support investment, nor is it organized to effectively pursue investments in infrastructure that will advance our regional goals, particularly for public transit projects and complex projects.

To establish clear regional priorities, PACTS will:

- **Generate Project List.** PACTS will create a prioritized list with a limited number of mid to large regional long-range projects.
- **Link Priorities to Funding.** The TIP Process and Procedures should include the regional priorities. Projects should be scored to consider economic development, multi-modal uses, regional goals and sustainability.

- **Education.** PACTS staff needs to stay informed about regional projects being implemented or planned by other agencies, such as the planned widening of the Maine Turnpike and the I-195 study led by the City of Saco. PACTS should serve as a catalyst, coordinator, and cheerleader for transformative projects this region needs. Equally important is for PACTS to communicate the status of projects back to PACTS committees.

ENGAGE THE PUBLIC

Transportation decisions are best made when there is broad public engagement. The greater public involvement PACTS has when making important transportation investments, the better PACTS can address the transportation needs of the people using the system. As the MPO, PACTS is required to engage in a regional planning process that creates opportunity for public participation for the UPWP, long-range plans, and TIP projects. During the 2016 FHWA Transportation Planning Certification Review, FHWA recommended that PACTS conduct a thorough review of its Public Participation Plan, including measures of effectiveness. The review should include recommendations for updates as necessary. The review also recommended an update to PACTS' Title VI, Environmental Justice and Limited English Proficiency plans.

PACTS should make a more concerted effort to better engage the public in decision making processes. PACTS needs to develop strategies to enhance public involvement. As noted in the previous section, PACTS does not have a strong electronic presence and the website is not user-friendly and has a poor search function.

PACTS is not active on social channels.

PACTS should improve public engagement in the following ways:

- **Communicate Publicly.** PACTS will use multiple communication outlets to provide information to the public and to allow for public input on PACTS projects. All of these outlets for communication were outlined in the "Lead the Region" selection earlier in the report.
- **Identify Audiences.** PACTS will develop and maintain an accurate contact list for communication. In addition to maintaining an accurate list, PACTS will also continue to update its Title VI, Environmental Justice and Limited English Proficiency plans on a regular basis.
- **Go to Them.** PACTS will identify events with other agencies and organizations as possible opportunities for outreach. Outreach will be framed around existing events and meetings, allowing PACTS to focus outreach to existing groups and on existing events or gatherings.

CONCLUSION

This process resulted in a comprehensive list of recommendations to strengthen the way in which PACTS operates and how PACTS is a leader in the region. There are a variety of recommendations, some short term and others long term, and implementation of all recommendations will take time. PACTS will need the support of members to accomplish the implementation. Members and staff will need to all row in the same direction to achieve success.