BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

UNLIKE OTHER AREAS IN MAINE, Southern Maine continues to gain population. Where and how this growth occurs — in the region and in Biddeford/Saco — has major implications for our quality of life and the environment.

In the last several decades, much of our region’s growth has occurred in suburban and rural areas, away from job centers and services. This sprawling development pattern, which is difficult to serve by public transit, has contributed to a reliance on vehicle travel, traffic congestion, longer commutes, increased air and water pollution, and the weakening of town and city centers.

To counteract this trend and encourage growth in more appropriate areas — where jobs, housing, and services are in close proximity — the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) has identified over 50 “Priority Centers” in the region that provide the most promising opportunities for future population and job growth. Downtown Biddeford and Saco are two of the largest, and most well-established of these Priority Centers.¹

TRANSIT SUPPORTIVE PLANNING INITIATIVE

THE TRANSIT SUPPORTIVE PLANNING INITIATIVE is an example of how PACTS is directing its resources towards these Priority Centers. In 2018, PACTS issued a “call for nominations” for pilot sites to develop transit-oriented development concept plans.

¹A map of all priority centers and corridors can be found in the PACTS Long Range Transportation Plan “Destination 2040,” available at: www.gpcog.org/169/Destination-2040
Transit-oriented development, known as TOD, is a type of development that maximizes the amount of residential, business, and leisure space within walking distance of a public transit hub. The goal is to promote sustainable growth by increasing walkability and usage of public transit, while reducing dependence on private vehicles.

The Cities of Biddeford and Saco submitted a joint proposal for the Mill District/Saco Island area, which was ultimately selected. This year, PACTS staff will work with municipal staff from both cities and a project stakeholder team to develop a TOD concept plan for the area.

**THE NEED FOR A TRANSIT-ORIENTED FOCUS**

**BIDDEFORD’S MILL DISTRICT AND SACO ISLAND** have seen tremendous growth in recent years. Approximately 800+ apartment and condo units have been redeveloped, and the repurposed mill buildings are now home to numerous businesses, restaurants, and breweries totaling ~270,000 square feet of space.

Although growth has been robust, many of the mills and adjacent properties have yet to be maximized to their full potential, and several buildings and properties are still in the preliminary stages of design or construction.

These properties include:
- ~6 acres east of Main Street on Saco Island
- Lincoln Mill in Biddeford
- Former MERC property in Biddeford
- Saco Mill #4 building on Saco Island

As this area continues to grow and thrive, it has become increasingly clear that the road network needs improvement. Vehicle traffic is often stop and go, and circulation and parking within the Mill District is often confusing.

The area is well-served by Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach (BSOOB) Transit and the Amtrak Downeaster, both of which stop at the Saco Transportation Center. However, the area’s auto-oriented design can make walking or biking to the transportation center unpleasant, and navigating the complex of mill buildings can be confusing even for long-time residents and tenants.

**BIDDEFORD-SACO TOD CONCEPT PLAN**

**TIMELINE:** January, 2020 - December, 2020

**BUDGET:** $40,000 (no local match).

**DESCRIPTION:** This project will study the area and provide ideas and recommendations for how to create a more pedestrian-oriented environment that supports the increased use of public transit.

**TEAM:** PACTS, SMPDC, Cities of Biddeford and Saco, BSOOB Transit, NNEPRA, and MaineDOT.

**PROJECT GOALS:** To identify opportunities to improve: bicycle-pedestrian connectivity; traffic flow, circulation, and parking; wayfinding and design; and access to transit.

**DELIVERABLES:** Final plan/presentation; conceptual visualizations of specific areas within the study area identified as problematic.

**PROJECT GOALS**

**AS THIS AREA CONTINUES TO DEVELOP**, the goal of the Biddeford–Saco TOD Concept Plan is to ensure safe, sustainable, and equitable growth. This plan will identify opportunities to improve:
- Bicycle and pedestrian connectivity
- Traffic flow, circulation, and parking;
- Wayfinding and design; and
- Access to transit.

**PROJECT SCHEDULE**

- **WINTER 2020:** Project steering committee kicks off; project team will evaluate existing conditions and engage stakeholders/public.
- **SUMMER 2020:** Project team will continue to engage stakeholders/public; project consultant will draft conceptual visualizations and revise as necessary; project team will begin to draft plan.
- **FALL 2020:** Project team will share draft plan and visualizations to the project steering committee for feedback.
- **WINTER 2020/2021:** Project team will submit final plan and presentation to each municipality’s City Council or appropriate Committee.