

Community Transportation Leaders Cohort 2 – Transportation Concerns & Solutions

April 2022

GPCOG has been working with 12 engaged participants who are learning about how to get involved with transportation planning and decision-making through the [Community Transportation Leaders \(CTL\) program](#). Piloted in 2019, the program is part of a larger effort by GPCOG and PACTS, to advance the inclusion of older adults, people with disabilities, young adults, and people of color. The goal of the program is to:

- To support participants to gain the knowledge and tools needed for meaningful participation
- To provide a peer-to-peer network to assist members in acting on the goals they set.
- To enable decision-makers to hear directly from participants about their experiences
- To act as a gateway for participation in transportation decision-making

During the six-part training, CTL members identified their transportation concerns they feel passionately about. Earlier this year, the CTL members presented their transportation concerns and their proposed solutions to the PACTS Regional Transportation Advisory Committee and the Executive Board. The presentations focused on the following four topics:

- Group 1: Improving Bus Routes – Zempfira Ahmadova, Sandi Shubert, Rustam Ahmadov, Bill Higgins
- Group 2: Improving Paratransit Services in the Region – Marisol Carmona, Mary Gagnon, Sadie Donnell
- Group 3: Barriers Faced by People with Limited English Proficiency – Marie-Immaculee Kabazo, Melanie Atia Sedua
- Group 4: Improving Safety for Transit Riders – Roseline Souebele Mayinga, Carol Ann Kilroy, Yvonne Elinga

Below is the summary of the presentations.

Transportation Concern	Why it Matters	Recommendations	Applicable Transit Providers
<i>Group 1 – Improving Bus Routes</i>			
<p>Concern around the existing transit network and lack of bus routes outside of Portland.</p>	<p>Routes affect how far one needs to walk to get their essential and social needs met. This includes the distance from one’s home to the bus stop or from the bus stop to the destination. Although some people can walk long distances, this can be difficult or impossible for older adults and people with disabilities. The path from the bus stop to the destination can be unsafe for walking as well.</p> <p>Furthermore, the lack of mobility affects the physical and mental health of community members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add additional routes to Cape Elizabeth, Gray and other areas without public transit. Expanding bus routes may provide opportunities for communities to consider affordable housing and would provide more access to recreation and nature for all. • Extend current bus routes to ensure key destinations are in walkable distance and safe for walking. 	<p>Greater Portland Metro</p> <p>South Portland Bus Service (SPBS)</p>
<p>Transit-related updates and information are not communicated to the community effectively enough.</p>	<p>Not effectively communicating route changes and other changes can put riders in unsafe and uncomfortable situations. Sandi shared an experience in which she was unaware of a route change on a route she regularly takes. She was surprised to be dropped off at a location that forced her to have to walk across a large parking lot and five lanes of traffic to get to her destination.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore improved approaches to sharing information with the community. This could include putting transit-related information on bulletin boards in public spaces, at bus stops, and in the lobby of housing complexes. Another idea is to create an outreach working group. This group can also provide input on what route would best serve their community. • Install real-time information display on the bus showing the bus route and the current location of the bus. 	<p>Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach (BSOOB) Transit</p>

Transportation Concern	Why it Matters	Recommendations	Applicable Transit Providers
<i>Group 2 – Improving Paratransit Services in the Region</i>			
<p>Concern around the reliability and quality of existing paratransit services.</p>	<p>People who rely on paratransit services are people who do not have access to automobiles – this includes older adults, people with disabilities, children, and others.</p> <p>Due to the model of scheduling rides in advance, the reliability, and the overall experience of interacting with the service, it often poses barriers for employment, access to opportunity, and full inclusion in society. This limits people’s ability to accept jobs and in choosing where to live.</p> <p>Sadie shared that transportation is the most stressful part of working. As a person with visual impairment, Sadie has needed to turn done jobs due to transportation barriers. She shared that it takes a great deal of tenacity to navigate the paratransit system to get to and from work. The paratransit system should not be this complicated, especially as not all consumers have the capacity to deal with these challenges.</p> <p>The timeliness of paratransit services is a great concern as well. Mary shared that she has often waited for her ride for indeterminate periods of time in the cold with no place to sit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement transparent quality improvement planning that includes analysis, goal setting, and measurable outcomes. • Increase funding and research other funding streams to improve wages, and employee retention, training, improving infrastructure such as scheduling systems, and making new services available. • Implement a new scheduling system. • Expand client choice of multiple paratransit providers would improve quality and allow for new innovations and partnerships such as on-demand transportation and a full range of equitable services. 	<p>RTP</p>

Transportation Concern	Why it Matters	Recommendations	Applicable Transit Providers
<i>Group 3 – Barriers Faced by People with Limited English Proficiency</i>			
<p>Insufficient access to information (including information in different languages).</p>	<p>Immigrants and refugees typically have no other mode of transportation other than the public transportation system.</p> <p>There is a lack of information and what information is available exists only in English.</p> <p>On top of this, there is a lack of cultural and local knowledge for people with limited English proficiency that makes it challenging to navigate the transportation system. There is no way to understand where the bus is currently located without some knowledge of the local area.</p> <p>The lack of mobility affects people's independence economically and socially.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use illustrative signs on the bus that does not require language skills to understand. For instance, this sign can convey the rules on the bus. • Create more multilingual resources and distribute it in locations that reaches the community. • Conduct ongoing training for bus operators on how to interact with riders to build understanding and patience for riders who require extra support. • Install a light signaling the movement of the bus: red light when the bus is moving, yellow light when it is about to slow down or start moving, and green light if the bus is stopped. 	<p>Metro, SPBS, BSOOB Transit</p>

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<i>Group 4 – Safety of Transit Riders</i>			
<p>Limited hours and frequency of service.</p>	<p>Limited hours and frequency of services impact the safety of riders as it forces riders to have to take measures they otherwise would not choose to take.</p> <p>Roseline shared her experience when she was new to the community. She took the bus to the Maine Mall on a weekend and while waiting for the ride back she learned that the service had ended on her route. She tried to walk back to Portland and learned that there were no sidewalks on the route. She feared that she would have to ask a stranger for a ride but was luckily able to connect to WiFi and called her pastor for a ride.</p> <p>The limited hour of service also impacts those who start and end work late at night and/or in the early mornings.</p> <p>Limited frequency of services constrains the riders to a limited schedule and often forces people to have to pay for Uber/Lyft rides. Certain buses don't run at all on the weekends.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the frequency of service hours, especially in the evening, so workers, shoppers, students, and all riders have safe access to the community, and reliable transportation to work, school, appointments, etc. • Explore better ways to share service alerts, both for people who are comfortable with technology, and those who are not. • Add more clarity and simplicity of the language on bus route maps and schedules. Transit agencies can create videos to explain how to read bus schedules. 	<p>Metro, SPBS, BSOOB Transit</p>
<p>Concern around the locations and accessibility of bus stops.</p>	<p>The location and accessibility of bus stop can cause unsafe situations for riders. Certain bus stop locations require riders to cross heavy traffic intersections. During the wintertime, bus stops are not always cleared of snow, requiring people to climb snowbanks or</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize faster snow removal at bus stops. 	

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	stand in the street to wait for the bus and when exiting the bus. This especially impacts older adults and those with disabilities.		
Riders missing the bus due to bus operators leaving the stop before the scheduled time, or by not noticing a rider waiting for the bus.	<p>When bus operators leave a bus stop early, this impacts people’s ability to get to work, appointments, etc, and leaves riders stranded and vulnerable.</p> <p>If it’s a sunny day or rainy day, riders may find shelter near the bus stop. If a rider is not standing right at the bus stop, bus operators may drive away without stopping.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that bus operators wait at the bus stop until the scheduled departure time, in the case that they arrive early. • Improve collaboration between bus operators and riders. Bus operators should stop even if a rider is not standing exactly at the bus stop location. • Facilitate conversations between riders and bus operators to share their experiences and concerns and come up with solutions together. 	

Watch the CTL presentations to the PACTS committees below:

- Presentation to the PACTS Executive Committee, February 22, 2022 – [recording \(from 01:26:50\)](#)
- Presentation to the PACTS Regional Advisory Committee, March 1, 2022 – [recording \(from 00:25:32\)](#)