Gorham-Westbrook-Portland Rapid Transit Study

Project Advisory Group (PAG)

February 16, 2023
10:00–11:15 am
Meeting Notes

PAG-member attendees: Jeremiah Bartlett (City of Portland); Rebecca Grover (Maine Turnpike Authority); Greg Jordan (GP Metro); Eamonn Dundon (Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce); Kevin Jensen (Town of Gorham); Dale Doughty (MaineDOT); Mike Arsnow (MaineHealth); Justin Barker (Portland Housing Authority); Jennifer Williams (FHWA); Jaime Parker (Portland Trails).

Other attendees from PAG organizations: Ari Ofsevit (Federal Transit Administration); William Gayle (NNEPRA); Jenna Shank (USM); Ryan Neale (MaineDOT); Mike Tremblay (GP Metro); Bruce Hyman (City of Portland); Tom Poirier (Town of Gorham).

Project-team attendees: Ericka Amador and Andrew Clark (GPCOG); Theresa Carr and Joe Poirier (Nelson\Nygaard); Anne Galbraith (ASG Planning)

Welcome & Project Update

Ericka Amador, GPCOG Project Manager, welcomed PAG members and reviewed the meeting agenda. Anne Galbraith provided a project update noting the advisory role of the PAG and appreciation for the technical input and guidance provided to date. The project is more than 50% complete with two future PAG meetings anticipated beyond today's meeting.

Tier 1 Evaluation Results

Joe Poirier, Nelson\Nygaard, recapped the project purpose, need, and goals and then walked the group through the Tier I evaluation methods and results. Main findings include:

- Concepts in Portland scored highest due mainly to higher transit demand and higher-density land uses. Some alignments in downtown Westbrook and near Rock Row also scored well.
- Alignments on roadways and closer to the 'front door' of communities scored better than rail-corridor alignments.
- Gorham concepts did not score high, due mainly to lower land use densities, although USM Gorham remains an important anchor.

The results were used to recommend four end-to-end Tier 2 Evaluation alignments for further development and evaluation.

PAG Questions/Discussion

- Was the ability to secure future federal funding a consideration?
  - Many of the screening criteria are consistent with federal funding criteria (adjacent land uses, ridership generation potential, etc.) and will continue to be considered in the next phase of evaluation.
- USM Gorham functions as a strong anchor for the Husky Line even though it is in a lower density area. How is strength of this anchor reflected?
  - Tier 1 screening considered the independent effectiveness of each section-level alignment. When pieced together in Tier 2, an alignment that spans the study area could perform better overall than its individual components.
  - Tier 2 will include ridership modeling reflecting student flows and USM employment. The design and definition of alternatives will also consider a potential park-and-ride in Gorham.
  - Tier 1 screening doesn't account for travel demand coming from west of Gorham and using a potential park-and-ride. This will be considered in Tier 2.

Towards the Tier 2 Evaluation

Theresa Carr, Nelson\Nygaard Project Manager, noted that the project's second round of public outreach happening in March will present the Tier 1 screening results and the draft end-to-end alignments for further definition.

- All four of the draft Tier 2 alternatives have several common components. Each of the alternatives that serve Gorham use a Route 25 alignment; 2) use Main Street east of downtown Westbrook to serve Rock Row; and, 3) share a common alignment in downtown Portland that uses Congress Street and terminates in the Ocean Gateway area. The relationship to the existing Husky Line will be defined during Tier 2 Evaluation but service connecting USM Gorham and USM Portland is assumed in all alternatives. The proposed alternatives are:

- Alternative 1: Gorham to Portland via Main Street and Brighton Ave. This is the most direct route between USM Gorham and downtown Portland.
- Alternative 2: Gorham to Portland via William Clarke Drive and the Portland Transportation Center. In this concept, it is envisioned that every other transit trip would terminate in downtown Westbrook, with others continuing to USM Gorham.
- Alternative 3: Gorham to Portland via Main Street, Brighton Avenue, and Woodford Street to lower Forest Avenue. It would also assume every other trip operates to USM Gorham.
- Alternative 4: Westbrook to Portland via William Clarke Drive and Warren Avenue to Forest Avenue.

Theresa noted the reason to end some trips in Westbrook in some alternatives would test the ridership and costs differences between serving Gorham for all rapid transit trips versus half rapid transit trips vs transferring in Westbrook to local transit. This reflects the importance of land-use densities for

supporting higher-frequency transit. The team has initiated discussions on future land use with each of the three communities and will continue these discussions to ensure the recommended alignment will generate good ridership. She also shared a definition of 'rapid transit' that will be included in the upcoming public outreach. In summary, infrastructure and other investments make rapid transit more competitive with driving and more attractive to riders.

Proposed rapid transit infrastructure along the corridor will be defined in party by what opportunities and constraints exist in each section and will vary along the corridor. General design principles will include:

- Incorporating priority treatments wherever possible
- Having more space between stops (fewer stops) than is typical for local transit service
- Transit-priority infrastructure in the existing right-of-way

The team is proceeding with assumptions of bus rapid transit on existing roadways, but hasn't ruled out a rail-based in-street option, and would consider whether initial bus rapid transit elements could someday be upgraded to accommodate rail.

<u>PAG Questions/Discussion</u>

- Do you assume 25 mph as average rapid transit speed? That might be considered slow by the public, though existing transit service is 12-15 mph.
  - Probably not average speed, more of a max speed though this could be higher if posted speed are higher. We will be looking at speed as a variable based on posted speed and level of transit priority.
- Tom Poirier from the Town of Gorham voiced discomfort with Alternative 4 not showing the line extending to Gorham.
  - We are looking at three alternatives that serve Gorham, but also want to understand how costs and benefits would be affected if an alternative terminated in Westbrook or offered different frequencies to Gorham. Operating plans will depend on ridership projections. Gorham is relatively low-density, relative to what is typically served with rapid transit, and we need to understand how that could impact a future rapid transit project. GPCOG would schedule a follow-up discussion with Gorham to discuss in more detail.
- If service from Gorham was 'express' to Westbrook then local to USM, how would that work?
  - Alternative 1 provides rapid transit service end-to-end; alternatives 2 and 3 would alternate between terminating in Westbrook or Gorham; Gorham-bound riders from points east could coordinate to board one-seat ride trips or transfer to local transit service in Westbrook; Alternative 4 is proposed to terminate rapid transit service in Westbrook but Gorham-bound riders would transfer to local transit service in Westbrook to continue to Gorham.
  - Theresa noted that operating plans will be developed for the Tier 2 alternatives once they are finalized. This happens after the current phase of public outreach is done. Operating

plans will consider how rapid transit and local transit service interact and where stops would be located.

- One participant voiced a desire for all transit vehicles to be electric with simple fare payment for customer convenience (e.g., Apple Pay).
- How would transit signal priority (TSP) affect pedestrian safety, especially at complex intersections such as Morrills or Woodfords corner?
  - TSP provides a few seconds of priority when transit vehicles approach, but wouldn't replace or negate pedestrian signals. Overall design would aim to improve safety for all users.
- Not sure these alternatives would take traffic off Gorham roads. There is a need to intercept regional drivers by providing parking in Gorham.
  - A park-and-ride lot in the vicinity of USM Gorham will be considered. Ridership modeling will consider demand from USM and commuters from the west.
- Consider Gorham Industrial Park as a potential terminus, if not USM Gorham. It is the third-largest park in southern Maine and is expanding by 140 acres, to a total of up to 400 to 500 acres.
- How are you thinking about mode/technology? Are we still evaluating rail?
  - The Tier 1 was 'agnostic' about mode and just looked at corridors. Tier 2 will make mode assumptions as part of the alternatives definition step. Bus-based alternatives look most promising. Bus rapid transit has similar advantages to light rail or streetcar, but with lower cost. We do not expect at this time to look at heavy rail but we will compare order of magnitude costs and benefits between bus rapid transit and for some in-street rail system to make sure we are not overlooking something.
- Will ridership forecasting be based on existing or future land use?
  - Ridership will be estimated for opening year and a horizon year of 2045. So, a bit of both. Land uses in Portland are transit supportive today, but we need to learn more about how land uses in Westbrook and Gorham might change over time.
- At what point will access to stops (pedestrian walkability) be considered? Also stop spacing?
  - Station access and safety is often an evaluation metric and yet its an unclear one. Walkability is good, and important, and yet we assume some station access improvements with design, so we have to ask what we are solving for – minimizing the need to design improvements, or addressing known safety problems with station access improvements.
  - Stops spacing is definitely part of the alternatives definition step – rapid transit stop spacing is farther apart than local transit, but we need to balance stop spacing with ridership demand.

Next Round of Public Outreach

This project's second round of public outreach will occur late this month and into next month and will include an online survey and a virtual public meeting on March 9. Ericka requested that PAG members help get the word out.

Next Steps

After public engagement in March, the study team will better define alternatives and begin Tier 2 Evaluation. A fifth PAG meeting is anticipated for later this spring to share Tier 2 results.

Ericka Amador announced she is leaving GPCOG and Andrew Clark will replace her as GPCOG's project manager for this study.

Public Comment
There was one comment from a USM representative.

- How do different alternatives compare to the existing Husky Line?
    - The alternatives proposed each overlap with some segments of the existing Husky Line. But rapid transit would introduce infrastructure treatments to make transit faster and more reliable, and it would operate more frequently.