

Summary of Public Outreach for PACTS Destination Tomorrow Update January 2014

PACTS held 6 forums between November 2013 and January 2014. Two were public officials' forums while four specifically reached out to the general public.

The number of people attending each of the forums ranged from 12 to 30, including staff. Some participants, especially passenger rail advocates, attended two or more of the forums. After an overview of PACTS' role and its recent activities, participants were asked to identify their transportation needs their ideas for how PACTS could better execute its role in the region.

In order to prompt participants, PACTS staff provided a list of transportation related topics; participants were also encouraged to identify additional topics if necessary. While no formal prioritization of issues was undertaken at the forums, some sense of importance may be gleaned from the extent of discussion time spent on an issue or the number of times a particular issue was raised. However, care must be taken in this extrapolation as some advocacy groups are more organized and willing to attend multiple meetings than others.

Detailed summaries of each forum(plus written communications from the public) are on file. The listing below represents those topics on which participants spent the most time or provided the most detailed comments:

1. Changing Demographics
2. Public Transportation (All forms including Passenger Rail)
3. Walking and Biking
4. Regional Land Use Management / Decision Making Processes / Investment prioritization
5. Asset Management: maintaining/improving existing infrastructure
6. Funding and funding mechanisms
7. Addressing needs of aging population as well as creating options that attract youth
8. Advanced Technology
9. Safety including complete streets
10. Mobility: Congestion and Traffic Management
11. Climate Change and Environmental Quality
12. Freight Movement

These topics are often interconnected. For example:

- Transportation needs associated with an aging public may be addressed by focusing on improved public transportation, pedestrian systems and regional land use management.
- Advances in technology can go a long way toward improving safety, traffic congestion and public transportation.
- Congestion management and crumbling infrastructure affects safety and is affected by funding.
- Regional land use management arguably has overlaps with all issue areas.

For purposes of this summary, the first six topics will be the focus and will integrate comments made relative to the remaining six. See the final page for some closing remarks.

1. Changing demographics of the PACTS region.

While some discussion focused on very specific projects, most participants offered suggestions affecting the overall transportation system and the manner in which decisions were made. Some suggested that developing education tools on the topics of transportation services and funding and the impacts of individual day-to-day living decisions may help the general public better understand how they might impact transportation decisions.

While viewed by some as an important direction to move toward, others voiced the opinion that inter-local, regional, collaborative land use and transportation decision making is not likely to gain much political support especially by rural communities.

Others urged PACTS to use more sophisticated decision making models to assure that funding decisions made resulted in progress toward overall objectives (LUTRAQ, INVEST etc.). Some participants felt that PACTS has regional authority to guide land development while others thought that initiating a regional discussion about land use management would be a more prudent approach to begin with.

Young people are moving to the cities and are less auto-centric causing more demand for public transportation. However, more rural areas of the PACTS region remain largely auto-centric. Rural areas have a higher proportion of commuters that cannot be feasibly served by public transportation necessitating continued investment in the highway network.

The immigrant population is growing in the most urbanized areas but the correlation between neighborhoods with a significant amount of immigrants and adequate transit may require further analysis.

PACTS' advocacy efforts need to be addressed to Augusta and to member communities. Better collaboration with the state (and other agencies/providers) was also identified as a need.

2. Public Transportation (all forms including Passenger Rail /Advancing Technology)

Public transportation is a multi-faceted system that includes fixed route, intercity, commuter, demand response and para-transit bus/van service as well as trains, taxis and trolleys. To forum participants, commuter and intercity transportation options in the form of passenger rail and fixed route transit services rose to the top in terms of transportation need.

System Design and Operations: The issue of making transit more viable received a lot of attention. Reliability, seamlessness, timeliness, frequency, low cost, and right sizing of equipment were all thought to be the key components as well as coordinated policies for parking (both pricing and

availability). Nairobi and Matatus Kenya, New York, Boulder, Miami, Charlotte, San Francisco systems were cited as examples to evaluate and emulate as appropriate.

Participants suggested that socio-economic and demographic data including jobs/housing connection be considered. They also acknowledged the challenge of meeting multiple competing transit service needs (students vs. commuters vs. elderly etc.); there is no “one-size fits all” system. Some argued that passenger transportation effectiveness increases with expansion of system while others believed that employing new technology (such as automatic vehicle location utilized on Smartphones) would improve its effectiveness including the need for attractive vehicles.

In considering the readiness of the region for full-scale transit, education and performance measures were cited as necessary components of any system design. Others suggested that parking prices needed to be changed in a thoughtful manner so as to avoid migration to the suburbs. Some advocated for a regional board to establish consistent fares and operating budgets and policies. Some thought there was a need for a regional taxi authority to step up licensing compliance and quality standards.

The Mountain Division rail was cited as another good investment in terms of removing freight truck congestion from highways; some also saw it as a viable passenger rail option if it were upgraded to Class 3 standard.

Studies/efforts in the works: While seen as a viable option for some, Portland and Auburn passenger rail was viewed with skepticism by others. Some saw the use of intercity bus for such service to be a more logical solution to the need to transport 1000 commuters per day. Metro commuter service from Portland to Yarmouth is desirable. Train users want more convenient service to the north or for shorter trips.

Future Planning: Rail and transit plans need to include consideration of connections to and from rail and bus stops. Planning for any new highway capacity, such as the Gorham East-West connector needs to include consideration of a bus-only lane. Exploring options from away is highly encouraged. (Curitiba Brazil, Montreal for example)

Funding Partnerships: Trolley systems, such as in Biddeford/Saco, should be re-established through public private partnerships.

3. Walking and Bicycling

There was general agreement that highway improvements are an opportunity to improve bicycle and pedestrian services. Bicycle and pedestrian systems need continuity and consistency. Gaps (like Eastern Trail between Wainwright Field and the Nonesuch River or in Yarmouth at East Main Bridge and others) need to be filled and users need to have predictable experiences traveling between communities. Highway should be designed as complete streets and retrofitted accordingly (reducing lane widths, paving shoulders, traffic signal recognition of bikes, universal pedestrian priority, closing streets off to cars and trucks, .

4. Asset Management: maintaining/improving existing infrastructure

There was general agreement that as a society we need to take care of the infrastructure we have before we expand the network or add more services. However, some argued that it was time to allow some components of the highway system to fall into disrepair (in support of divestiture) and funnel limited transportation dollars to systems that would generate the most return on investment. This sentiment blended well with the viewpoints of those interested in directing growth in ways that increased density and diversity in places where it could take advantage of walking, biking and transit systems and thereby reduce reliance on highways by automobiles.

Mobility Management: Some argued that congestion was relative with some spots hotter than others. They suggested reducing congestion by using a variety of techniques including expanding transit, coordinating signals, use of complete streets policies/design parameters, use of dynamic message boards, re-designing intersections, coordinating zoning and density standards, diverting I-295 through traffic away from Portland peninsula, creating new capacity such as a Gorham East-West toll connector and strategizing ways to address movement of freight throughout the region.

Safety Management: There was little specific discussion of safety needs as an issue unto itself. Most safety related comments were associated with improvements to bike-ped, highway, and public transportation systems.

Environmental/Sustainability: In terms of asset management, some cited the need to weave sustainability actions, such as storm water management and storm surge management, into every aspect of the PACTS plan. Others suggested that PACTS promote conversion of all fleets to natural gas.

5. Regional Land Use Management / Decision Making Processes / Investment prioritization

Regional land use management is a complex issue driven by myriad values. Each community now manages their own land use development and so one community's policies often have a spillover effect into another community. It was generally recognized that quality of life could benefit from an integrated pedestrian, bicycle and transit system.

Inter-municipal collaborative land use planning and management is viewed as an ideal that could align land use policies between adjoining communities serving to level the playing field between communities which could attract certain development along corridors and near bus stops. Others saw regional land use authority as the basis for an investment decision tool that relied on incentives and dis-incentives. A regional transfer of development rights program was also thought to be a tool that could benefit the region.

Maine's Sensible Transportation Policy Act is a law based on the principles of connecting land use with transportation. Participants recognized that the current political environment doesn't support using the incentives in the law.

6. Funding and funding mechanisms

It was evident from comments received that there is little understanding of the transportation funding process, the funding formulas and the decision making structures. Education tools were suggested.

Investment decisions need better tools to funnel the money where it will do the most good. While expanding the systems would meet needs, concerns were raised about who would pay. Taxes already too high; and there is inadequate funding to keep system in good shape. User fees/tolls may be a viable option although some will see it as a tax. Transit TIF, auto and bike registration fees were specifically mentioned.

The overall transportation funding decrease, coupled with reduced driving (and collected of associated fuel taxes) along with the Turnpike's commuter toll discounts are working against the goals articulated by forum participants.

Summary:

Education & Policy:

- Educate the public around decision making processes
- Explore use of a land use transportation and air quality model for making investment decisions.
- Initiate regional planning / management discussions throughout the region
- Explore and promote best management transit system design and operation practices from around the world

Planning & Investment:

- Assure that transit routes are located to serve the most transit dependent populations
- Take care of the existing system but invest in assets that will provide the greatest viability for alternative modes (i.e. corridors)
- Advocate for addressing storm surge implications in future investment and design decisions
- Close gaps in regional bike/ped systems
- Expand funding partnerships to include business; explore new funding paradigms
- Fund congestion management techniques that do not include building new capacity