**Maine Department of Transportation Workforce Transportation Pilot Competitive Grant Program**

**Application Package**

**Purpose**

The Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan provides $5 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) to support initiatives and grants for local, regional, and state workforce transportation pilot projects, especially in rural areas. This competitive grant program provides funds to support workforce transportation pilot projects around the state. Funds may be used for capital and operating costs including program start-up costs.

The program’s goals are consistent with the Maine Climate Council’s Transportation Working Group recommendation to improve public transportation as a strategy to reduce vehicle miles traveled and thereby reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector**.**

**Program Administration**

The MaineDOT Bureau of Planning is administering program funds on a grant basis. We anticipate a $750,000 award cap; however, the award cap is subject to change based on need and volume of applications. MaineDOT reserves the right to negotiate project scope and deliverables prior to finalizing awards.

There is no minimum or maximum number of awards. Projects will be selected based on merit and the availability of funding.

The Bureau of Planning’s selection process will award funds in a timely manner that serves the intent of the Workforce Transportation Pilot, furthers the goals of the Department, and promotes the public interest.

There is no application deadline. However, potential applicants are encouraged to submit projects as soon as possible. The Bureau of Planning will accept, evaluate, and make decisions on grant applications on an ongoing, rolling basis until all funds have been disbursed. MaineDOT understands and will consider in its evaluation process and awarding of funds that some potential applicants will be able to apply for funds sooner than others.

While projects may support transportation of workers from rural areas to more urban areas or centers of employment, the program’s focus is on workforce transportation in rural areas. As such, some funds will be targeted specifically to connecting workers in rural areas to employment opportunities in rural areas.

In general, awarded projects should begin within four months of contract execution. This requirement can be waived based on circumstances as described by the applicant.

**Eligible Applicants**

Federal guidance provides that funds may be used to respond to COVID-19’s negative economic impacts on the tourism, travel, and hospitality industries. Other identified industries suffering comparable economic impacts in Maine include Healthcare & Social Assistance; Construction, Trade, Logistics; Manufacturing; Education; Agriculture, Fishing, & Forestry; Information; and Clean Energy. Applicants should demonstrate that they are addressing workforce transportation challenges, and proposed initiatives should be focused on workers and potential workers. MaineDOT staff will work with potential applicants to ensure that any proposals meet these requirements.

Applications may be submitted by employers or groups of employers, municipalities, non-profit organizations, human service organizations, and public/private transportation providers. Applicants are encouraged to engage with potential partners including, but not limited to, regional planning organizations, chambers of commerce and other business groups, county governments, workforce boards, and community action programs.

**Eligible Projects**

Funding will be provided for targeted operating assistance, capital investment, and/or implementation of technology improvements that enhance the transportation of workers, particularly in rural areas. Project planning may be included as part of the award. All funded activities will be considered as pilots that demonstrate a plan for financial sustainability, since additional future state or federal funding is not guaranteed and should not be assumed.

A minimum match of 20% is required. Eligible match funding sources include cash and in-kind non-monetary contributions including goods (such as computers, communications equipment, facilities), services (such as administrative or communications support), and expertise (such as marketing/website development or strategic planning). To ensure that match funds are on hand or readily accessible, applicants should include a schedule and describe the process for acquiring match funds.

Additionally, no more than 20% of the total project cost should be designated for administrative costs.

Potential applicants are invited to consult with MaineDOT staff to further quantify challenges and identify solutions. MaineDOT staff is available to work with potential applicants to better understand challenges and potential solutions. To request a consultation, please contact Ryan Neale at ryan.k.neale@maine.gov.

**Project Selection**

The evaluation and selection process reflects the intent of the Workforce Transportation Pilot, the priority initiatives of the state, and the limitations on the availability of state funding. All applications will be reviewed by MaineDOT staff. MaineDOT may also consult with staff of the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Maine Department of Labor, and the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future.

**Selection Criteria**

The following factors will be evaluated as part of the application review:

1. **Projected Impact**

The project is likely to enhance workforce transportation within the project service area or demonstrates innovation in serving current and potential workers. Applicants should estimate the projected impact.

1. **Project Partners**

The applicant has partnered with one or more local or regional organizations, which may include but not be limited to employers, municipalities, non-profit organizations, human service organizations, workforce organizations, public/private transportation providers, and those recognized as a source of support to communities that are unemployed or underemployed. Applicants should explain the role and expected contributions of local and regional partners and may consider a joint application and/or letters of support.

1. **Deliverability**

The application demonstrates an ability to deliver the proposed project. The plan for this project should include project scope, cost, target market, assets to be used, staffing, technical resources, and an implementation schedule.

1. **Sustainability**

The application should include a plan for ongoing operating and maintenance costs and include a plan for financial sustainability after MaineDOT grant funds have been expended.

1. **Evaluation**

The application includes benchmarks, performance metrics, and a plan to evaluate success. MaineDOT will meet with recipients each year and at the end of the project to evaluate its success and identify necessary adjustments.

1. **Local Match**

The maximum share of workforce transportation pilot funding is 80%. The applicant and any partner organizations must provide at least 20% of the total project cost and document the source(s) of matching funds, including in-kind contributions.

A goal of the program is to encourage discussions and project applications from diverse applicants across the state. As such, MaineDOT may consider in its evaluation factors such as geography, applicant and project size, socioeconomic factors, and expected impact, particularly on communities hardest hit by COVID-19, including lower-income workers; black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) individuals; individuals with disabilities; justice-involved individuals; older adults; and younger (age 16 – 24) adults.

Other factors that may warrant additional consideration include, but are not limited to:

1. Projects include a match of greater than 20%.
2. Projects serve as an example for other efforts and/or are replicable in other areas or situations in the state.
3. Projects address other issues, such as housing, childcare, and workforce development, that affect workforce participation. The Maine Department of Labor’s survey on barriers to returning to work may be a helpful resource for potential applicants.
4. Projects incorporate strategies to encourage greater use of all modes of our transportation network, such as carpool matching, transit subsidies, or bike sharing, for example.

**Grant Contract Award**

Project funding will be provided contractually. All state and federal requirements, including those associated with the American Rescue Plan Act, will be applicable. The term dates of the grant contract will be negotiated post-award. Successful applicants will be required to submit to MaineDOT, upon expiration of the grant, a summary of the success or failure of the program and lessons learned.

**Project Duration**

MaineDOT suggests that applicants only submit one budget year for purposes of determining the size of the project for which funding is sought. Applicants seeking more than one year of funding should provide a forecast of significant budget changes and indicate the share that future program grant funds would be asked to cover in out years. A declining share of total project costs covered by grant funds helps to demonstrate project sustainability. For multi-year projects, MaineDOT will meet annually with the applicant to assess the need for additional funding.

**Instructions for Completing the Proposal**

* All requests for financial assistance from MaineDOT’s Workforce Transportation Pilot program should use the accompanying application. Applicants may include relevant attachments as desired.
* All proposals that have public and/or private funding partners should provide separate letter(s) of commitment signed by authorized executives of partnering entities that have agreed to provide funding. Letters of support from local stakeholders should also be included.
* Written proposals should be submitted in Word, and budgets should be submitted in Excel. Forms requiring signatures may be converted or scanned and saved as PDFs.
* All applications should be submitted to: ryan.k.neale@maine.gov