

PUBLIC TRANSIT ADVISORY COUNCIL

BIENNIAL REPORT TO GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE

May 2021

Submitted by



MaineDOT

**PUBLIC TRANSIT ADVISORY COUNCIL BIENNIAL REPORT
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I. STATUTORY REPORTING REQUIREMENT

Excerpt from PTAC Statute 23 MRSA 4209-A:

1. **Report.** The council shall report on its deliberations and any recommendations by March 1st of each odd-numbered year to the Governor and the joint standing committees of the Legislature having jurisdiction over transportation matters and health and human services matters. The report must include the following:
 - A. An assessment of the level of public transportation services provided to the public; [2015, c. 182, §8 (NEW).]
 - B. Recommendations for the level of service that should be provided and an estimate of the cost of providing those services; and [2015, c. 182, §8(NEW).]
 - C. Recommendations for the optimal coordination of transit services with other senior and veteran services. [2015, c. 182, §8(NEW).]

II. Background

The Public Transit Advisory Council (council) is currently comprised of 31 members offering diverse perspectives on Maine’s urban and rural transit needs (see Appendix A for a list of members). The Council was established by the Maine Legislature in 2015 under **23 MRSA 4209-A**.

The council is charged with advising the Departments of Transportation, Labor and Health and Human Services on matters related to public transportation. Two PTAC meetings were held during this latest 2-year period: January 17, 2020 and May 10, 2021. Looking ahead, the PTAC will be meeting quarterly in 2021 and 2022. All meeting materials including minutes are available at www.maine.gov/mdot/transit/ptac.

Most of the past two years have been very challenging for our State’s transportation providers. The pandemic has had a huge impact on everyone’s travel patterns, and ridership on transit services declined significantly as a result of stay-at-home and social distancing guidance.

Maine was fortunate to receive several sources of Federal relief funding for public transportation services. A summary of this funding is below. The priority has been providing assistance to agencies for lost revenues as well as keeping needed transit services safe and operational during the pandemic and also the recovery period that will follow.

Half of the awarded amount from the CARES Act apportionment was distributed to the rural transportation providers based on MaineDOT’s normal formula. From the remaining balance, MaineDOT distributed funds to meet urgent needs, as allowed by our State Management Plan. A summary of funding is shown below.

Summary of Formula Funds vs. Supplemental Funding during the Covid-19 Pandemic

FTA TYPE	FFY2020 Formula	CARES	CRRSAA	ARP
5307 (Urban)	\$ 13,359,285	\$ 60,373,374		\$ 8,796,362
5310 (Capital)	\$ 1,211,363		\$ 210,189	\$ 210,193
5311 (Rural)	\$ 8,342,115	\$ 24,928,187	\$ 22,979,406	\$ 8,894,109
	\$ 22,912,763	\$ 85,301,561	\$ 23,189,595	\$ 17,900,664

Notes:

1. Normally, operating assistance is provided at 50% federal share, requiring a 50% match.
2. Supplemental funding is provided at 100% federal share.
3. FFY2021 allocations are consistent with FFY2020 (\$23,009,354)

CARES – Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
CRRSAA – Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations
ARP – American Rescue Plan

Despite the recent challenges, much has been accomplished in the past two years. An update on activities and progress made since the 2019 PTAC Report is provided in Appendix B. These are primarily updates related to the recommendations included in the 2019 Locally Coordinated Transit Plan. More information is available here: <https://www.maine.gov/mdot/transit/publications/lcp/>.

There have also been several developments over the past two years that have and will continue to affect transit in Maine. These developments are described below. As a result of these developments, MaineDOT is taking a step back and considering how the efforts will be coordinated moving forward and making sure the Department's vision and goals align with the needs of Maine's citizens – particularly in rural areas of the State.

- *Climate Change Focus Area: Maine Won't Wait: A Four-Year Plan for Climate Action* was released in December 2020. This plan sets new climate change goals and include strategies to reduce emissions from the transportation sector, including expanding public transportation and ridesharing programs, developing innovative public transportation options in rural areas, and accelerating Maine's transition to electric vehicles. This is a new focus area for MaineDOT.
- *GO MAINE*: The GO MAINE program, a partnership between MaineDOT and the Maine Turnpike Authority (MTA), provides online ridematching for carpoolers and encourages transportation options other than single occupancy vehicles. The GO MAINE program is undergoing a strategic evaluation and is expected to expand in 2022. MaineDOT is also transitioning into the lead agency for the program.
- *Department of Health and Human Services Transportation Programs Evaluation*: DHHS provides several transportation programs for social services purposes. DHHS undertook a comprehensive review of their transportation services to improve quality and access to transportation and an assessment of options moving forward. The report is in the final stages of review.
- *COVID-19*: the COVID-19 pandemic struck Maine in March 2020, resulting in a severe drop in transit ridership and dramatically altered travel patterns. There is uncertainty in travel patterns going forward and it is necessary for our state to anticipate changing demand and expectations for public transportation as a result of the pandemic.
- *Several important Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Transit Plans and Studies*

As part of this process, the Department is updating its transit vision and statewide strategic transit plan (the last strategic plan was completed in 2015). The new strategic plan will include the following:

- Update on total and unmet need, particularly in the rural areas of Maine, including identification of underserved cohorts within different regions of the state
- Update on the ability of the existing system and its individual components to meet this need efficiently and effectively, particularly in rural areas.
- Identification of opportunities to improve coordination within the current and future system. This should include the potential integration of non-traditional transit models, ridesharing, vanpools, and partnerships with employers that may meet needs more efficiently and effectively and include associated innovations and technologies.
- Recommendations of best practices, alternative approaches, and models to providing public transportation for Maine as a whole and for the various regions of the state, especially rural regions, given available resources, including pilot project identification
- Implementation plan for the strategic transit plan; and
- 5 to 10-year targeted investment plan that supports the overall goals and direction.

The focus of the work will be on bus, van, on-demand transportation, and passenger vehicles using the road network. Passenger rail and ferry services will be reviewed at a high level. The transit plan is intended to be a statewide plan that focuses on the customer and the transit system. The intention is to roll up MPO transit plans and focus on public transportation services in rural areas, with an understanding that urban and rural transit services are part of a statewide transit system. The transit plan should weave together initiatives throughout the state and provide a roadmap for the statewide transit system that reflects the needs of the customers.

The PTAC members provide valuable perspectives and will be integral to the strategic plan update and the other new statewide transit initiatives, many of which they've been involved with. The transit strategic plan update is expected to be completed in late 2022.

As a result of MaineDOT's necessary pause and the scope of the upcoming strategic transit plan, this PTAC report does not include a new assessment of the level of public transportation services provided to the public, recommendations for the level of service that should be provided, and the estimate of providing those services since these will be thoroughly analyzed in the transit strategic plan update that MaineDOT will soon be kicking off. However, Appendix C includes this information from the previous PTAC report.

Appendix A

PUBLIC TRANSIT ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP MAY 2021

Name	Affiliation	Term Expiration
Lori Brann	MaineDOT Planning, Clerk	unspecified
Tom Reinauer	MaineDOT Planning, Chairperson Kittery Area Comprehensive	unspecified
Stephanie Carver	Transportation system (KACTS) Androscoggin Transportation Resource	12/31/2023
Jennifer Williams	Center (ATRC) Bangor Area Comprehensive	12/31/2021
Connie Reed	Transportation System (BACTS) Portland Area Comprehensive	12/31/2022
Zoe Miller	Transportation System (PACTS)	12/31/2023
Jessica Maurer	Maine Council on Aging	12/31/2021
Tim Cowan	MaineHealth	12/31/2022
David Landry	Jackson Laboratory Maine Economic Development	12/31/2023
Chris Hall	Directors Assoc.	12/31/2021
Kim Moody	Disability Rights Maine	12/31/2022
Michael Hallundbaek	Waldo Community Action Partners	12/31/2023
Paul Towle	Aroostook Partnership	12/31/2021
Clyde Barr	Maine Housing	12/31/2022
Dana Knapp	Concord Coach Lines	12/31/2023
Rep. Lynne Williams	Transportation Committee, Democratic Party	12/7/2022
Sen. Brad Farrin	Transportation Committee, Republican Party	12/7/2022
Patricia Quinn	Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA)	12/31/2021
Susan Lessard	Town of Bucksport Greater Portland Transit District	12/31/2022
Greg Jordan	(METRO) Food and Medicine / Transportation	12/31/2023
Darcy Cooke	for All	12/31/2021
Katherine Freund	ITN America Lewiston and Auburn Railroad	12/31/2022
Jonathan LaBonté	Company	12/31/2023
Al Schutz	Schutz Transit Solutions, LLC	12/31/2021

Rebecca Grover	Maine Turnpike Authority / GO Maine	12/31/2022
Giselle White	Maine VA Healthcare	12/31/2023
Sandy Buchanan	Maine Transit Association	12/31/2021
David Lawrence	Community Transportation Leaders	12/31/2022
Barbara Schneider	Citizen	12/31/2023
	Augusta Age-Friendly Advisory	
Duane Scott	Committee	12/31/2021
Deirdre		
Wadsworth	Hardypond Construction	12/31/2022
Sharri Venno	Houlton Band of Maliseets	12/31/2023

Appendix B

UPDATE ON STRATEGIES FROM 2019 PTAC REPORT AND 2019-2023 LOCALLY COORDINATED PLAN FOR PUBLIC TRANSIT

A. Immediate (2019-20)

Increase State Operational Funding to Transit Agencies (Lead = Legislature and MaineDOT)

- Increase state funding share from 9% to 25% of operational costs in FY2020 (\$4.25 million) and to 35% national average (\$6.8 million, \$5 per capita) in FY2021 – Funding source TBD
- MaineDOT may utilize a portion of the funds for statewide initiatives such as the Moving Maine Mobility Network, volunteer driver support system, rider information systems and cost-effective centralized purchasing of shared infrastructure and services.
- Distribute 50% of the remaining state funding by formula to be used as needed and 50% on a competitive basis for service expansions requiring the new locally-sourced matching funds
 - *MaineDOT is currently evaluating State funding for public transportation and has also updated its reporting numbers to more accurately reflect the total amounts provided. Previous reporting did not include funds for the Maine State Ferry Service, NNEPRA/Downeaster and GO MAINE for example.*

Accelerate Fleet Modernization (Lead = MaineDOT)

- Pursue federal discretionary grants
 - *2019: MaineDOT supported fleet upgrade grant applications with matching funds for Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach Transit (BSOOB), Greater Portland Transit District (METRO) and the Lewiston Auburn Transit Committee (citylink) as well as for the rural fleet. BSOOB and rural fleet grants awarded. Bangor applied for and received funding for Pickering Square Transit Hub redevelopment.*
 - *2020: Maine did well in 2020 discretionary grant applications. MaineDOT was awarded \$9M to support construction of the Acadia Gateway Center so did not apply for vehicle funding but provided match funding for successful FTA grants awarded to METRO for buses and Casco Bay Island Transit District (CBITD) for the Peaks Island hybrid propulsion ferry and shore charging system. Additional funds were also awarded to support the pier extension needed for the vessel. Bangor received FTA funding to support a system of bus stop shelters.*
- Apply VW Environmental Mitigation Funds as match when eligible
 - *Over \$7M has been programmed for transit investments, providing 20% match to federal funds for the purchase of 39 clean diesel vehicles. The VW funds are providing the majority share of funding for battery electric buses for BSOOB Transit and Metro, the shore power system for CBITD's new hybrid Peaks Island Ferry and replacement of the Thompson Ferry engine with a hybrid propulsion engine. All investments should be delivered by 2022.*

- Budget for state matching funds in transportation bond
 - *Matching funds for federal grants are included as needed in transportation bond requests. The VW funds have reduced the need for bond funds over the last few years but bonds have covered the need for gasoline-powered transit vehicle replacements used by most rural transit providers as well as replacing the pre-2009 diesel vehicles that did not qualify for VW funds. By 2022, all older diesel vehicles will have been replaced.*
- Prudently invest in electric and hybrid propulsion systems and charging infrastructure
- *Greater Portland Transit District and Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach Transit finalizing engineering for battery electric buses & charging infrastructure to be delivered in 2021. CBITD building hybrid propulsion ferry to replace the Machigonne II serving Peaks Island. MaineDOT exploring hybrid propulsion technologies for all future ferries and committed to Captain E. Frank Thomspson (serving Vinalhaven) hybrid engine replacement in 2022. MaineDOT following industry developments and will include all viable fuel and propulsion system options in transit bus bid specs as they become available.*
- Seek assistance from FTA and AASHTO in addressing small transit bus manufacturing quality and delivery problems
 - *At MaineDOT's request, AASHTO hosted a discussion and coordinated a survey of state vehicle purchase agents which returned mixed experiences.*

Support Volunteer Driver Networks (Lead = MaineDOT)

- Develop scope of services
- Hire consultant using federal planning funds to provide collaborative technical assistance
- Evaluate after two years and propose budget going forward if justified
 - *MaineDOT is taking a pause on this effort until after the update to the Statewide Strategic Transit Plan has been completed. It is important that this effort aligns with overall goals to improve transit options, particularly in rural areas. The Department plans to explore how these networks can best integrate with other initiatives, build upon successes, and explore best practices from other states.*

Launch Moving Maine Network (Co-Leads = Greater Portland Council of Governments, Maine Cancer Foundation, Maine Primary Care Association, MaineDOT)

- Secure core funding (FTA grant application pending); \$250,000 start-up funding for Network could be secured by state in FY2019 budget if funding is increased as proposed above
 - *FTA funding secured in 2019. Maine Cancer Foundation replaced by MaineHousing as backbone team member. DHHS has also joined as backbone team member.*
<https://www.gpcog.org/389/Moving-Maine-Network>
- Formalize steering committee
 - *Complete and steering committee has been meeting regularly.*
- Confirm goals and work plan (to include mobility navigator development plan)
 - *Ongoing.*
- Engage working groups
 - *The Peer Learning and Professional Development Work Group has hosted several well-attended webinars in association with MassMobility, as well as two successful Moving Maine Network Gatherings. The Technology and Innovation Work Group has begun meeting and will oversee coordination of the many technology-related initiatives underway including the follow up from the Maine Transit Technology Summit held in July 2020. The*

Policy and Advocacy Work Group will be led by the Maine Primary Care Assn and began meeting in February, 2021.

Develop Medical Scheduling Pilot Program (Lead = Maine DHHS)

- Convene MaineCare Advisory Board to engage providers
→ *Tried but unsuccessful in identifying willing medical providers in 2019.*
- Work with Mobilize Maine working group to create framework
→ *Maine Primary Care Assn is willing to work on this with its members once pandemic is under control.*
- Identify pilot providers & region(s)
- Trial and record value to medical providers, patients and transit providers
- Evaluate and replicate

Explore GoMaine Trip Planner (Co-Leads = MaineDOT and Maine Turnpike Authority)

- Create work plan and budget with technology consultants advised by GoVermont
→ *Trip Planner with new capacity to serve individual trips of any type and with increased capacity overall was launched in June 2020 at no additional cost to the Turnpike Authority or State. Ridesharing was not able to be promoted since March with pandemic, so it is difficult to evaluate appreciation by users. A project team reporting to the Moving Maine Technology & Innovation Working Group is looking at GTSF Flex data for demand response routes, so that all public transit options could be included on the GO MAINE site.*
- Perform cost-benefit analysis; evaluate and proceed accordingly (may require new funding)
→ *MaineDOT to consider contributing to the cost of GTSF Flex data administration within its FTA Planning, Administration and Technical Assistance budgets. Further improvements will need to be evaluated.*

Foster Age-Friendly Community Development (Lead = Maine Council on Aging)

- Launch Municipal Task Force on Healthy Aging (Lead = Maine Council on Aging)
→ *Phase 1 was completed in October 2019. Phase 2, entitled M-DASH (Municipal Data Across Sectors for Health), was launched in December 2019. Transportation is one of four key issues to be considered. Four pilot communities of different scales have been selected to demonstrate best practices: South Portland, Gray, Hallowell and Eastport. South Portland has gone first and developed the data dashboard that will be used by all; its top priority was fall prevention rather than transportation. A Steering Committee is being formed to guide the future of the initiative.*
- Develop long range development and transit plan for southern Maine: Transit Tomorrow project (Lead = GPCOG/PACTS)
→ *Final report released in early March: <https://www.gpcog.org/176/Transit-Tomorrow>*
- Enable optional local and regional sales taxes with portions dedicated to public transportation, transportation-oriented development, transportation demand management strategies and Age-Friendly Community design (Lead = Maine Municipal Association, MPOs)

Update Maine Transit Association Directory (Co-leads = Maine Transit Association and MaineDOT)

- Establish data repository and updating procedure
- Model print version after Southern Maine Mobility Guide

<https://www.gpcog.org/mobility-for-all/>

→ Directory completed in early 2020. Available on the MaineDOT Public Transit page:
<https://www.maine.gov/mdot/transit>

Deepen State Agency Coordination (Lead = MaineDOT)

- Department of Education (multi-use of buses & drivers, driver recruitment & training; transit buses on school grounds)
 - No progress to report. *Maine Won't Wait Climate Action Plan calls for developing plans and incentives to migrate to electric and hybrid school and transit vehicles.*
- Department of Labor (workforce transportation, employer-sponsored routes, driver recruitment & training)
 - *First step proposed to assemble workforce transportation working group under Moving Maine umbrella.*
- MaineHousing (transit-friendly development requirements and developer outreach; residential housing manager engagement as mobility managers)
 - *Residential housing manager training to be incorporated into Southern Maine Mobility Solutions for Maine Grant pilot project under Moving Maine.*
- Department of Economic and Community Development (employer-sponsored routes, age-friendly community development, tourism & outdoor recreation transport)
 - *Included public transportation funding in Economic Development Strategy. Liaison assigned to PTAC.*
- Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry (age-friendly community development)
 - *Age-Friendly Steering Committee established. MaineDOT participated on the Committee and final report was released:*
<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/Age-Friendly-State-Plan.pdf>
- Department of Health and Human Services (engage MaineCare medical providers in coordinated appointment scheduling; seek opportunities to enable multi-funder ridesharing; work with State and District Health Coordinating Councils and hospital networks to address transportation challenges for patients and workforce)
 - *Commissioner Lambrew has convened high-level interagency meetings to explore coordinated transportation options. DHHS conducted outreach sessions on MaineCare transportation and rural health needs, is consolidating program performance standards; creating RFP for consultant to evaluate and recommend system efficiencies with DHHS programs and public transit; Office of MaineCare Services and DOT exploring shared ride options for longer distances – will require subsidy or risk share for operator. Following CCAM activities; hoping for federal initiatives to address regulatory barriers.*
- Bureau of Motor Vehicles (CDL process)
 - No progress.

B. Mid-Term (2021-23)

- Develop Transit and RideSharing Promotional Campaign (after information is easy to access)
- Explore Coordinated Statewide Electronic Ticketing/Transit Pass System (following evaluation of METRO system implementation)

- *Project team formed to work on this under Moving Maine; same recommendation resulted from Transit Tech Summit in July 2020. MaineDOT worked with METRO and others to provide more detailed presentation on the DiriGo pass on April 5th 2021, currently in use by METRO, BSOOB and South Portland Bus Service.*
- Explore Relationships with Independent Transportation Networks for End Mile Services
 - *Moving Maine subcommittee is exploring data sharing requirements among providers to coordinate complete trips.*
- Encourage Employer-Sponsored Transit Routes; develop and share models that work
 - *Nothing yet initiated. Jackson Labs, one of the most involved employers in this realm, is joining the PTAC.*

Appendix C

UNMET TRANSPORTATION NEEDS – Excerpt from 2019 PTAC Report

While it is difficult to precisely pinpoint unmet transportation needs as many of those surviving without basic services are hidden from view, three methods of assessing unmet needs have informed the recommendations of the council and are summarized below.

- A. Qualitative: Based upon substantial Locally Coordinated Plan outreach in 2017-18;
- B. Documented: Based upon unfunded applications requested by transit providers; and
- C. Modeled: Based upon Transit Cooperative Research Program Estimation Methodology.

A. Qualitative: Based upon Substantial Local Coordinated Plan Outreach in 2017-18. Based upon significant outreach conducted (see www.maine.gov/mdot/transit/publications/lcp for details), it is determined that the following groups of people have unmet transportation needs:

- Low-income Mainers (outside of Non-Emergency Medical Trips if MaineCare members), including significant numbers of veterans, new Americans and homeless citizens.
- Older adults, especially those living in rural areas.
- Developmentally disabled (outside of MaineCare covered trips).
- Visually impaired – many have given up and are leaving Maine due to a combination of the low levels of service and lack of accommodations.
- Most people without the ability to own/maintain/drive a vehicle outside of key service centers.
- Evening and weekend workforce in urban areas, including employees of restaurants, convenience stores, entertainment venues, malls and big box stores.
- Those in addiction recovery, many without driver's licenses or financial resources.
- Those with choices who would like to rely on public transportation but service levels are too low (headways too long).

B. Documented: Based upon Unfunded Applications Requested by Transit Providers.

Each year MaineDOT entertains annual funding applications from its network of rural sub-recipient public transit providers but must turn a significant portion of requests down. Separate applications are made for capital needs (primarily replacement vehicles). In 2018, requests for operating assistance outweighed available federal and state funding by \$2.25 million. On top of this gap, MaineDOT could neither fully fund requests to support intercity feeder route services, nor several emergency requests for assistance received during the year. This brings the documented funding gap for rural providers alone to \$2.5 million.

Local resources are not emerging to address the gap. As a result, services are being cut in both urban and rural areas (Auburn, Saco-Portland and Lewiston-Brunswick are examples). Provider funding requests are modest as they are aware of MaineDOT's fiscal constraints. They likely understate the real need. Following the existing formula of

evenly dividing state funding between urban and rural systems, the identified need based on unfunded rural system applications is conservatively \$5 million.

c. Modeled: Based upon Transit Cooperative Research Program Estimation

Methodology. The calculation of estimated needs, as set forth in the Maine Strategic Transit Plan 2025, is based on the number of households in Maine that do not have a vehicle (40,892 households in 2017). The primary methodology relied upon to calculate need in the Strategic Plan followed the analytical process outlined in *Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 161, Methods for Forecasting Demand and Qualifying Need for Rural Passenger Transportation: Final Workbook*. (Washington D.C. 2013.) A comparable method was used to estimate demand in urban areas. The calculation is based on the difference in the number of daily one-way trips that a household with no vehicles would take when compared to a household with one vehicle (households with no vehicles make 1.7 fewer trips in rural areas, 5.2 fewer trips in urban areas). To arrive at total need in Maine, the number of no vehicle households in rural areas is multiplied by 1.7, and that number is multiplied by 300 days to get estimated annual need in rural areas. The number of no-vehicle households in urban areas is multiplied by 5.2, and result is then multiplied by 300 days to get estimated annual need in urban areas. The formula uses 300 days, rather than 365 days, to account for the fact that fewer transit trips are taken on weekends.

This same calculation could be done using other indicators, such as the number of households below the poverty line, mobility limited population, or population over 60 years old. Each of these would yield higher trip demands and costs than the zero-vehicle household indicator. Therefore, these figures are conservative. They also only include operating and administrative expenses. Capital costs for vehicles and facilities are also needed for the system to function.

Table 1. Trip Needs, Trips Provided, Trip Gap				
	100% of Trip Need (# of Trips) 2017	20% of Trip Need (# of Trips) 2017	Trips Provided 2017	Trip Gap 2017 (# of Trips)
Fixed Route	21,243,029	4,248,606	3,348,091	900,515
Flex Route	6,768,676	1,353,735	348,924	1,004,811
Rural	8,773,386	1,754,677	171,325	1,583,352
Total	36,785,091	7,357,018	3,868,340	3,488,678

Source: Update to estimated needs contained in Maine Strategic Transit Plan 2025 by Rothe Associates, March 2019.