

## Downeast Transportation, Inc. (DTI)

### Contact Information

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### Service Summary

Service area: Hancock County  
Type of service: Flex route, subscription, seasonal shuttle service

### DTI Bus Service

Downeast Transportation provides year-round shopping trips to Ellsworth and Bangor, and in-town shuttle service for Bucksport, Ellsworth, and Bar Harbor, as well as commuter service to Bar Harbor, Ellsworth and Blue Hill. Downeast Transportation also operates the Island Explorer which serves Acadia National Park and neighboring towns from late June through Columbus Day.

**Year-round service.** DTI's year-round service includes:

1. **Commute to Bar Harbor:** Subscription commuter service from Bangor, Franklin and Milbridge to The Jackson Laboratory (Jackson Lab) in Bar Harbor and back five days per week.
2. **Commute to Ellsworth:** Commuter service from Bar Harbor to Ellsworth and back five days per week.
3. **Commute to Blue Hill:** Commuter service from Ellsworth to Blue Hill five days per week except no service in July and August.
4. **Shop in Ellsworth:** This is an in-town shuttle that operates in Ellsworth on Mondays and Fridays.
5. **Shop in Bangor.** This bus operates from Bar Harbor to Ellsworth and Bangor, and back on Mondays and Fridays.
6. **Bucksport Shuttle:** This is an in-town shuttle that operates on Wednesdays. There is also a shuttle between Blue Hill and Ellsworth that operates on Wednesdays except for July and August.
7. **Ellsworth Shuttle:** Same as Shop in Ellsworth, #4, above.
8. **Bar Harbor Shuttle:** This is an in-town shuttle that operates on Tuesdays.
9. **Stonington Bus:** This bus operates Friday mornings beginning and ending in Ellsworth and serving Blue Hill, Deer Isle, Stonington, Sedgwick, and Brooklin.
10. **Bar Harbor to Ellsworth.** This is a mid-day shuttle that operates five days per week between Ellsworth and Bar Harbor.

**Island Explorer – seasonal service.** DTI's Island Explorer service includes the following routes, all of which operate on a seasonal basis seven days per week:

1. **Oceanarium Route:** Operates six times daily between Village Green and the Oceanarium.

2. **Eden Street:** Operates nine times daily between Village Green and Eden Street hotels.
3. **Sand Beach:** Operates seven times daily between Village Green and Sand Beach/Otter Cliffs.
4. **Loop Road:** Operates seven times daily starting at Village Green and around the Park Loop Road.
5. **Jordan Pond:** Operates 12 times daily between Village Green and Northeast Harbor.
6. **Brown Mountain:** Operates 12 times daily between Village Green and Brown Mountain/Northeast Harbor.
7. **Southwest Harbor:** Operates 14 times daily between Village Green and Bernard.
8. **Schoodic:** Operates eight times daily between the ferry terminal and Prospect Harbor.
9. **Trenton:** Operates eight times daily between Village Green and Acadia Gateway Center.
10. **Blackwoods:** Operates five times daily between Village Green and Blackwoods Campground.

## Summary of Service Changes

1. **Campground route.** As an adjustment to MaineDOT's reconstruction of Route 3, the Campground Route has been separated into two routes - the Oceanarium Route and the Trenton Route, both of which originate at Village Green in Bar Harbor.
2. **Sand Beach route.** The Sand Beach route has been separated into two routes; the first will be the Sand Beach route and the second will be the Blackwoods route.
3. **Schoodic route.** The Schoodic Route frequency has been doubled, and the operating season has been extended.
4. **Jordan Pond route.** The Jordan Pond Express and the #5 Jordan Pond route have been combined.
5. **Mid-Day Bar Harbor/Ellsworth service.** This service fills in the gap between the morning and afternoon runs. It was initiated in response to DTI's partnership with Jackson Lab which is opening a new facility in Ellsworth. This is a general public route funded entirely by Jackson Lab.

## Summary of Accomplishments

1. **DTI transportation manager.** The transportation manager's position has been changed from a seasonal to year-round position. Having a full-time manager allows DTI to recruit drivers year-round and provides for smoother transition to the summer tourist season.
2. **Driver wage increase.** In order to retain existing drivers and enhance driver recruitment, DTI has increased wages from \$11.25/hour to \$15.25/hour. Since DTI has 125 drivers, this has resulted in a major increase in DTI's operating costs.
3. **Integrated Technology system.** The Island Explorer utilizes an integrated technology system that enhances the efficiency and performance of its buses and provides important information to its customers. The system utilizes GPS and data radios that transmit information to DTI's data base every two minutes from the time the bus leaves on its first run until service is completed for the day. The system keeps track of bus locations and automatically tabulates bus boardings. People can download a satellite app that tells them when their bus will arrive at a particular stop. There are signs throughout

the service area that show the next departing bus. Signs are in a number of locations including Village Green, Hulls Cove Visitor Center, Sieur de Monts, Blackwoods Campground and Seawall Campground. While the system has been in place since 2002, improvements are made on a continual basis.

4. **Workforce housing initiatives.** Housing seasonal workers has always been a challenge, but the problem got worse when Bar Harbor prohibited weekly rentals and multiple employees living in one apartment. DTI works with Acadia National Park and Island Housing Trust on outreach efforts to campgrounds and motels and with a venture capitalist in Portland to develop housing options for seasonal workers. The Park Service owns a parcel of land and has indicated a willingness to locate workforce housing on it, but doesn't have the capital to build it. Another option would be to locate recreational vehicles on Acadia Gateway Center land, but it would require a zoning change from Trenton.
5. **Island Explorer Outreach.** DTI has taken a number of steps to recruit drivers for the summer season. These include hiring a full-time transportation manager, increasing driver pay, sharing drivers with Sugarloaf, employing commuter drivers who work at Jackson Lab during the day, and setting up a driver recruitment table at Aspen and Vail in Colorado.
6. **Island Explorer service for residents.** Island Explorer primarily serves the tourist industry, but also provides transportation for year-round residents. Approximately 22% of the ridership, amounting to well over 100,000 trips, consists of year-round residents.

## Plans and Studies

1. **Acadia National Park Transportation Plan.** The Park Service's draft Transportation Plan includes a number of provisions for better managing the increasing number of visitors to Acadia National Park including the expansion of Island Explorer. This translates into a need for more buses, more money, and more drivers. The Volpe Center, a quasi-governmental agency in Cambridge, Mass. is conducting a study for the Department of the Interior to quantify the additional bus-related needs.
2. **Year-round service.** DTI has hired a private consultant to look at the entire year-round service. The study is funded in part from planning grants from Jackson Lab and FTA. One of the provisions of the study – the mid-day Bar Harbor/Ellsworth service, has already been implemented.
3. **Bar Harbor Ferry terminal parking plan.** This plan addresses cruise ship traffic and additional bus service in Bar Harbor. If the Canadian government doesn't return ferry service to Bar Harbor, then all cruise ship passengers will arrive at the ferry terminal. Cruise ship passengers then will be bused from the ferry terminal to other destinations by motor coaches or the Island Explorer. The Bar Harbor parking plan also envisions seasonal parking meters which will likely impact year-round service and create a need for a satellite parking area with transit service into town.
4. **Other.** DTI is working with the Town of Bucksport, Downeast Community Partners, Healthy Bucksport and Bucksport Seniors on a more robust transit system in the Bucksport area. DTI has also hired a consultant to look at increasing in-town shuttles in Bar Harbor and Ellsworth, and for increasing transit to and from the Ellsworth and Jackson Lab. DTI is planning to reach out to the Blue Hill Peninsula to discuss increasing transit in that area.

5. **Island Explorer Planning.** DTI has hired a private consultant with a grant from Friends of Acadia to study and plan for the project's future as Acadia National Park implements its Transportation Plan and the town of Bar brings the former Bluenose Ferry Terminal on line.

## Future Priorities

1. **Commuter bus replacement.** Replacement of five heavy duty commuter coaches within the next five years.
2. **Additional commuter buses.** Up to four additional heavy-duty coaches to bring commuters from farther afield as the Jackson Lab fills its new Ellsworth facility.
3. **Island Explorer Fleet Replacement/Expansion.** By the 2020 season all 28 El Dorado MSTII's will have been replaced. We anticipate expansion by several buses.
4. **Better year-round service.** Put on the road more meaningful service that better meets the needs of the general population. This will likely require a different model that is adequately funded.
5. **Acadia partnership.** We anticipate significant growth for Island Explorer over the next five years as Acadia National Park enacts changes including a reservation system for parts of the Park Loop Road. This growth will likely include a longer season, opening earlier in the Spring and closing later in the Fall, as well as additional routes and more frequency on existing routes. This will require fleet and employee growth.

## Ridership

Ridership on the Island Explorer exceeds its capacity. Every route is at or over capacity. The number of trips set a new record in 2018, surpassing by 12% the 3% ridership increase in 2017. DTI estimates that about 22% of the riders on the Island Explorer are local riders.

The Park Service has concluded that summer tourist traffic in Acadia has overwhelmed the park's road system, particularly Ocean Drive. Excursion buses, which serve the cruise ship industry, are part of the problem. They contribute to congestion on Ocean Drive and do not fit on Cadillac Mountain, yet routinely bring tourists to the mountain summit. The draft plan envisions prohibiting motor coaches in Acadia and limiting the size of buses to no more than 15 feet. The phase-out of motor coaches will be done over time so as to minimize negative impacts on the cruise ship industry.

L.L. Bean has been a major contributor to Explore Acadia (\$200,000 per year over five years), in part because DTI's buses are rolling billboards for the company which has seen growth in on-line sales and wants to attract more customers to its brick and mortar retail stores.

The composition of DTI's year-round service has not changed. The percentage of elderly riders has remained constant, in part because people are driving much later in life and the fact DTI's year-round service was originally built on the Meals for Me service which brought people from outlying areas to community centers for meals (now meals are brought to seniors in their homes).

DTI conducts rider surveys on its buses. The most recent onboard passenger survey was carried out on Island Explorer buses during August of 2018 by Tom Crikelair Associates. Surveys were distributed between 7:30 a.m. and 5:15 p.m. on bus routes originating at Bar Harbor Village Green and Hulls Cove Visitor Center. A total of 500 surveys were distributed and 462 completed surveys were returned, for a response rate of 92%. About 13% of respondents were year-round or summer residents. Survey highlights included:

- Bus riders continue to be very pleased with free Island Explorer bus service
- Passengers expressed gratitude to L.L. Bean for the corporation’s contribution to the bus system
- A number of visitors commented on overcrowding and/or being turned away by full buses
- Some seasonal workers asked that Eden Street service be extended until the end of October
- 82% of Island Explorer riders reached an Island Explorer bus stop without using a private vehicle
- There were a number of requests for air conditioning
- There continues to be very strong support for continuing the Island Explorer, with 98% of survey respondents agreeing that it is very important
- 91% of survey respondents agreed that it is very important to keep the service free
- One third of respondents feel it is very important to add buses to increase seating capacity and service frequency

<b>Downeast Transportation General Public Flex Route Trips</b>					
	<b>FY 2013</b>	<b>FY 2014</b>	<b>FY 2015</b>	<b>FY 2016</b>	<b>FY 2017</b>
Island Explorer	423,998	503,224	534,547	575,397	581,305
Year-Round	64,661	58,775	56,423	52,044	59,018
<b>Total</b>	<b>488,659</b>	<b>561,999</b>	<b>590,970</b>	<b>627,441</b>	<b>640,323</b>

## Fares

<b>Fare</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Commute to Bar Harbor: \$20/week from Bangor &amp; Milbridge. \$17/week from Franklin &amp; Ellsworth</li> <li>2. Commute to Ellsworth: \$17/week, single ride \$6</li> <li>3. Commute to Blue Hill: \$20/week, single ride \$5</li> <li>4. Shop in Ellsworth \$1 all day fare</li> <li>5. Shop in Bangor: \$9 from Bar Harbor, \$7 from Ellsworth; round trip is same as one-way if completed same day</li> <li>6. Bucksport Shuttle: \$1 all day fare</li> <li>7. Ellsworth Shuttle: Same as # 4</li> </ol>
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	8. Bar Harbor Shuttle: \$1 per day in one town  9 Stonington Bus: \$1 within one town, \$2.50 between neighboring towns; \$5 for longer rides  10 Bar Harbor – Ellsworth \$17/week, single ride \$6.  Island Explorer: no fare, but contributions appreciated
<b>Exact Fare Required?</b>	Yes
<b>Electronic Fare?</b>	No
<b>Senior/disabled Half fare available?</b>	No
<b>Senior/disabled half fare pass required?</b>	N.A.
<b>Other discounts?</b>	Commuter subscription fares available on some routes
<b>Multi-ride prepayment?</b>	Yes
<b>Monthly pass prepayment?</b>	N.A.
<b>Passes available from:</b>	Commuter subscriptions from DTI Office

## Buses/Facilities

- 1. New buses.** DTI currently has 43 buses that include a combination of 30-foot propane and 40-foot coaches and six cutaways. The majority of its buses are flat-fronted, big window, propane buses. All of the Island Explorer buses are designed to fit under Acadia’s bridges, but are too large to go up Cadillac Mountain Road. The National Park Service is planning to limit buses on Cadillac to those that are 15 feet or less.

DTI has 20 replacement buses and two new buses on order which were expected to be in operation for the 2018 season. However, there has been a delivery holdup while these buses undergo FTA-required testing, causing unexpected expenses of \$250,000 to repair existing buses for the start of the 2018 summer season. The buses are being manufactured by Hometown Trolley in Wisconsin.

DTI also has \$1 million in Park Service money to purchase four additional buses without FTA funding support.

- 2. Maintenance.** DTI handles its own light maintenance but outsources heavy maintenance and repairs.

## Agency Volunteers

DTI does not use volunteers. All of its transit services are on agency buses driven by paid drivers.

## Volunteer-Based Transportation Groups

DTI refers people to volunteer organizations when their services are needed. These groups, which are primarily oriented to seniors, include Healthy Acadia, Island Connections, and Friends in Action.

## Coordination/Outreach/Partnerships/Unmet Needs

DTI works with the National Park Service, Friends of Acadia, L.L. Bean and local supporters to plan for and coordinate transit services, and to plan for Acadia's continued growth.

DTI is working with the Town of Bucksport, Downeast Community Partners, Healthy Bucksport and Bucksport Seniors on a more robust transit system in the Bucksport area.

DTI coordinates with Downeast Community Partners (DCP) primarily through Maine Transit Association meetings, but also by working with DCP on community transit planning initiatives, such as the Bucksport Healthy Community meetings to consider expanding transit in Bucksport. DTI is also working with DCP to coordinate DTI's mid-day Bar Harbor to Ellsworth service with DCP's weekly Ellsworth to Bangor service. DTI has not been as successful coordinating its services with West's Transportation.

## Innovations/Creative Approaches

Integrated technology, workforce housing, Island Explorer outreach. See discussion under "Summary of Accomplishments."

## Major Challenges

1. **Drivers.** One of DTI's major challenges is finding enough drivers, especially when the system is expanded to serve Acadia's growing needs.
2. **Acadia's growth.** DTI and the Park Service share the challenge of how to sustain Acadia's growth without destroying the resource that people come to see. A major part of the solution is transit and how best to provide it.
3. **Commuter coaches.** DTI needs one additional commuter coach for the Jackson Lab commuter population, and will need to replace five existing coaches within the next five years. Each coach costs approximately \$500,000.
4. **Workforce housing.** It has become increasingly difficult for seasonal workers, including seasonal drivers, to find affordable housing.

## Public Participation Summary

1. **MaineDOT Strategic Plan.** Participated in MDOT's Strategic Plan 2025 process.
2. **Acadia planning process.** Participated in Acadia National Park's two-year Transportation Planning process.
3. **Transit workshop.** Hosted a Region 2 Transit workshop at our facility on October 12, 2016.

4. **Transportation Research Board.** Presented to the Transportation Research Board in Washington DC on the topics of public/private partnerships and intelligent transportation systems.
5. **MDI League of Towns.** Presented information on transit to MDI League of Towns in 2016, 2017 and 2018.
6. **Local budget presentations on transit.** Presented information on services to municipal budget meetings in Bar Harbor, Southwest Harbor, Mount Desert, Tremont, Ellsworth, Winter Harbor, Bucksport.
7. **Bucksport Thriving In Place Grant Initiative** Town of Bucksport Winter 2018.
8. **Bar Harbor Ferry Terminal** planning meetings throughout late 2017 and 2018 to date.
9. **Bar Harbor Downtown Parking Plan** in Fall of 2017
10. **Public meeting in Ellsworth** March 2018 in reference to our proposed service enhancement between Bar Harbor and Ellsworth.
11. Hosted and presented in partnership with Acadia National Park and the Ellsworth Chamber of Commerce to **“Leadership Hancock County”** with a focus on our partnership with the park service and its economic impact in the region.