

**MaineDOT Strategic Transit Plan 2025
Steering Committee Meeting
February 6, 2014**

MaineDOT Strategic Plan Steering Committee Meeting #
Meeting Summary
Date: February 6, 2014
Time: 1:00 PM – 3:30 PM
Place: MaineDOT Conference Room, Augusta, Maine

Attendees:

Steering Committee Members:

Paul Murphy, Steve Linnell, Jim Wood, Jessica Mauer, Jim Phipps, Dave Projansky, Dennis Fitzgibbons, Don Cooper, Carla Dickstein, Brian Hodges, Kathy Singleton

MaineDOT Staff:

Susan Moreau *Manager, Multimodal Planning & Operations*

Lori Brann *Multimodal Planning & Operations*, Barbie-Jo Lord *Multimodal Planning & Operations*

Consultants:

Peter Schauer-Principal in Charge, Rich Rothe, Bill Millar, Tom Meyers.

Welcome

Sue Moreau: Transit Plan Steering Committee. Several steering committee members could not attend. We are continuing to build on that giant transit puzzle by assembling more information and working with the Consulting Team on putting the plan together. Meeting turned over to lead consultant, Peter Schauer.

Peter Schauer: Explained that while he was hospitalized for three weeks last fall, missed the last Steering Committee meeting in October and was unable to travel until January 2014, the project has continued and the budget is adequate to complete all the tasks. Reviewed agenda: report on the results of the telephone survey, a report on the public hearing, the state management plan, a report on needs, and a project update and review of the calendar for the coming months.

Results of Telephone Survey

Curtis Mildner: The survey was conducted in October and November of 2013 and conducted according to specifications developed by Peter Schauer and refined by Curtis Mildner, Market Decisions. There were up to 68 questions. Some were follow-up questions, so not everyone

answered all 68. Calls were made from Portland call center on behalf of MaineDOT (hearing that the survey was being done on behalf of MaineDOT, people were more willing to talk than with other surveys conducted). Survey used a random sample of land lines and cell phones.

Completed 400 surveys statewide, which was not a large number for analyzing subsets of the respondents. The overall response rate was 49% (it's typically about 18%). The MaineDOT reference helps. This response rate is very representative. 41% of the responses were from cell phones.

Confirmation that survey is representative? Response rate from demographic groups are compared to census estimates. Did not reach many people in the 18-29 age range (8%). Conversely, 42% of the respondents were 60 or over. Response rate was corrected by weighting.

In terms of margin of error, the overall sample contains 400 responses which is a 95% confidence rate, plus or minus 5%. But there are differences in the margin of error of between 5% and 29% because of differences in response rates to specific questions. The survey is therefore not reliable for young people, or for people who rode bus once/week.

Most people (97%) have a drivers' license and access to a vehicle. Bus knowledge is limited. Only 3% used the bus. Unmet needs are larger. One reason may be that most people are not thinking about transit.

44% say transit is good enough. 68% view it as necessary. 84% agree that it's for everybody. 76% say medical transportation should be provided. When asked about a list of funding priorities, 80% favored highways, then transit. Funding should be a state responsibility. It appears the results show some sort of favoring of private operators. When offered a list of ways to fund transit funding by lottery was preferred.

Most people believe bus service is good for economic development. The current high price of gas is not a motivator for using transit.

93% of households have a vehicle. The average was 2.2. There was little difference in vehicle accessibility by age. There is a difference by income for access to vehicle. Low income (less than \$30,000) means less access. Lack of adequate transportation affects 8% of respondents. MaineCare issues exist for some people.

1/3 of people can name their local bus service; 2/3 cannot or think they have no bus service. Many feel there is not enough information available about existing systems. Most commonly mentioned services were METRO and BAT. The sample size in metropolitan areas was not large. Bus ridership numbers are not large.

2/3 say transit is a necessary service, but 52% say it is nice but not necessary. This raises question about whether these responses contradict one another. People tend to agree with the

surveyor. A lot of people haven't thought about transit much. Recommend to ignore this result as reverse tone may have confused respondents.

21% agree – bus is only for low income people, but 91% say it should be for everyone. There is a fundamental belief that there should be more transit. 85% feel that transit should be subsidized where necessary. People view public transportation as fundamental.

There is not as much support (35%) for public transit for social purposes. 10% agree that medical transportation should be an individual responsibility. The entire survey was about buses and vans, so the question on the importance of transit may be biased. About 2/3 feel the state should pay for buses between urban areas, but people say it should be privately operated.

The biggest support for funding was a lottery. None of the options presented and favored by respondents would take money out of respondents' pockets. There was support for options paid for by others. While support for transit is strong, support for funding is skewed.

Does bus service have other benefits? People felt it would be good for the local economy.

In response to gas prices: 50% say they've done nothing. Not many would use more transit. There was no consensus on how to pay for it.

Not many differences by different categories such as income were discovered. The problem likely is that people are not thinking a lot about public transportation. Clear results are found when you ask about hot button issues and for most people they have not thought about transit, buses or vans.

Peter Schauer: Bill Millar and Peter Schauer discussed the survey report. Bill Millar prepared a brief interpretation the survey from his perspective.

Bill Millar: Perspective comes from many years working with transit, including his former role as APTA President. What Mainers believe is consistent with what others say around the country.

It's typical to get 75% to 80% support for public transit. When you ask about use, you get different numbers. You always have to worry about how people respond to questions. For example, you get low numbers about use of transit, but when you ask about whether the respondent used transit in the past year, 20-25% state that they have. This is similar to what you would find around the country.

Question dealing with lack of knowledge is unusual. Surprising to see 2/3 saying they don't know the name of their local service. Support for public transportation is high. Non-emergency medical transportation is more important than fun trips.

Anti-government sentiment can play a role in perceptions. In other parts of the country, there are people who don't want public funding for roads or buses. Anti-government bias does not appear to be strong in Maine.

In terms of the funding issue, something Senator Richard Russell said: “Don’t tax me, don’t tax you, tax the man behind the tree” seems to apply in that a lottery was favored among the choices given for supporting transit.

The situation is hopeful, for funding. It looks very much like what is seen around the country, even in urban areas with service. 80% of respondents seem to say we need to improve – and not just for the poor, it should be available for all Mainers. All these factors could be the basis of advocacy for public transit.

Some say that people who benefit ought to pay. We’re talking about higher fares, but that won’t generate near enough money to pay for it. If everybody is expected to pay something, that would seem to generate support. Whatever plan is developed it must be clear and able to be understood by all.

What happens around country when others are faced with this? You win about 70% of the time. Over the past 10-12 years, the experience has been that when you are voting for some initiative that supports public transit, you win about 70%. Almost always, in the 30% that you don’t win, the proposal usually had something the public totally opposed or it was too complicated. People have to believe that the proposal is fair and easy to understand.

All in all the survey has good news for transit advocates.

Questions and discussion followed Bill Millar’s comments.

Are there models for funding support?

Revenue financed districts work where the business community along the line helps provide the local share. Funding support is usually project-related so businesses can point to the benefit from them. It’s important to have business support.

How much support is out there? There’s a huge opportunity for education, coordination, business development and economic development. The opportunity is huge. Maybe we can change direction if we have someone to facilitate things.

Modern technology can help us overcome fear. Coordination is important. Maybe there can be a common payment mechanism. A common payment card for example. Prices are starting to come down. Maybe drivers’ licenses could have a chip to pay for transit. Maybe there could be a package of things for the Department to take to the legislature.

When you approach the public, if voters don’t think you do your business right, they won’t give you more. You have to demonstrate that you can do it right.

Whether drivers' habits have changed the add-on question might be "what would the threshold be to change behavior?" There is a generational shift in how young people view vehicles. Fewer own vehicles. Some people have made the decision on where to live in part based on availability of public transportation.

Gas prices have threshold points that keep changing. It was never thought we could survive \$2, \$3, \$4 gas. It's kind of like someone bouncing a basketball on stairs; the new base becomes higher than it was before. The Millennials are more interesting – the jury is out on that. Lower income may be having an impact. Where transit is an alternative, it makes a difference. Kids are not riding around for the fun of it. There are a lot of other distractions to keep them busy.

We're seeing a movement of older people out of Maine. There are a growing number of people who no longer want to drive. They are looking for communities that have transit outside of Maine. We are not looking at this. We need to be aggressive about planning our communities. We need to get the word out to rural people about coming to smaller cities to live.

This issue is being raised around the country. Where you can get interested coalitions working to improve transit, it's a good way to get things done. An example of this is the work of hospitals to get reliable transit service for their patients.

Page 18 of the draft includes information on regions. Is it possible to get regional data?

There is a difference on the coast. There is more of a problem on the coast with transit than elsewhere. The state was divided into 4 regions based on cultural differences. If we look at cross tabs, there are differences along the coast.

Can it be divided differently?

There are add-on costs to get that data and the data set does not lend itself to county or smaller analysis.

As the plan is formed, is there a consideration of the plan itself being an amalgamation of regions? Can you create a plan based on regions?

The approach is not to have any lines; let the data determine where we are going. The puzzle has to be built on data; how transportation is going to look. It has to be an air-tight plan. Things may have to be done differently. Let the data speak to us first. There are starting to be threads such as livability and livable communities, having more clustered housing to enhance better service. The recommendations have to fit into what needs to be encouraged.

How knowledgeable are people? Relevancy is important. People may have fundamental beliefs about transportation without knowledge.

The survey of riders is going on now. It will measure rider satisfaction with existing service and there will be a report on this survey at the April meeting.

There is an issue involving information. One of the things discovered in other surveys is that ridership turns over every 5 years. Many people going in and out of the system means marketing has to be constant. Otherwise 20-25% of potential ridership know nothing about the system. Word of mouth is important. People are not having enough information about the systems they ride because people drop in and out.

Typically what you find is that 30% of riders have been riding less than one year. There is a lot of churn. That may be why people who don't use transit support it.

Public Hearing and State Management Plan

Sue Moreau: Public hearing was attended by about 20 people. The hearing was primarily on the State Management Plan but also had a report on the Telephone Survey and a Status Report on the activities of the Strategic Plan.

The State Management plan was revised as of this February 2014. The State Management Plan includes policies on how MaineDOT spends federal transit money. A draft of the Plan is on the MaineDOT website and it is also being reviewed by the Federal Transit Administration. Written comments on the plan are being accepted for the next 30 days.

Needs Analysis

Rich Rothe: What are the transit needs in Maine and how are they measured? A definition of urbanized areas and rural areas is important. There are four urbanized areas in Maine: the Bangor/Brewer area, the Lewiston/Auburn area, the Portland area, and the Kittery area. For the purpose of this analysis, all other areas of the State are defined as rural areas.

One of the sources to analyze needs is TCRP (Transit Cooperative Research Program) report 161, Washington D.C. 2013. It has methods to analyze needs based on the number of no-vehicle households. The number of no-vehicle household (obtained from the American Community Survey portion of the U.S. Census website) is multiplied by the mobility gap (1.7 for New England) and the resulting sum is multiplied by 300 to determine overall need. Based on national analyses, TCRP report 161 states that a system does well to meet 20% of the need. In the urbanized areas, the mobility gap is different (5.2, based on the 2009 National Household Travel Survey).

Maine has 8 transit regions. There is a wide range in the extent to which various transit systems are meeting the need. The figures range from a high of 30% for Sanford Transit to a low of 2% for the Brunswick Explorer.

While it's important to look at need, it's just as important to estimate how many members of the general public would ride public transit (the demand). TCRP Report 161 contains a formula for estimating general public (non-program) demand. For any given jurisdiction, the formula is $2.2 \times$ the population 60 and over plus $5.21 \times$ the mobility limited population 18 to 64 plus $1.52 \times$ the number of residents living in no-vehicle households. The data on the various populations is obtained from the American Community Survey. This method works for rural areas and flex route systems in small cities, but not urbanized areas. Maine's flex route systems such as Kennebec Explorer meet more than 100% of the demand. For rural areas, results are mixed, with 83% of the demand being met in Aroostook County, but only 2% in the rural areas of Kennebec County and in Somerset County.

The approach going forward is to prepare a technical memorandum documenting how much it would cost to bring up all rural services to a Maine standard of meeting 20% of need. Rural and urban would be calculated differently.

Questions followed the presentation:

The number of trips in a one-vehicle household appears too high. Why?

The total number of trips includes all types of trips. When you leave the house to go to work, that's one trip, and when you return home, that's another. If you have a child in school, a school bus picking up your child is a trip, and the child's return is also a trip. Five trips per day in a rural area is really not all that many.

In the analysis it seems like we were double counting when you add in the number of trips provided by transit.

Not really. It's a statistical measurement of how much of the need you are meeting.

The City of Bath has three large senior housing centers. How does that factor in the count?

The formula is very conservative in that it is based only on households having no vehicle.

The trips per year data do not estimate students, commuters, and others who might ride the bus. What about all the other people that you are not counting?

This is a very conservative formula that only measures need based on the number of no-vehicle households that are not taking trips that people living in a household with one vehicle would make. IN a study like this, you generally don't get into this much detail on methodology. The calculations are sort of a black box with data you may not want to feature in all presentations of the data. You may not want to show this much information on methodology except as needed in the working papers. The question that we need to answer in the next 20

years is how do we reach people that do not use transit. Demand is made out of hundreds of factors and the formulas are just starting points.

Project Update

Peter Schauer: A hard copy of meeting dates and critical activities was handed out and is attached as part of these minutes. The project is on budget. The next meeting will feature a report on the rider survey, an outline of the final report and key issues for shaping the final report. More data on need and demand will be presented.

The next meeting is April 8th at 9:00 AM in DOT room 216.

Adjourn

MaineDOT Strategic Transit Plan 2025 February 2014 – January 2015 Meetings and Critical Activities				Steering Committee Attendance Required/Optional/Not Required
Date	Time/Place	Activity	Notes/Purpose	
February 6	9:00 AM – 11:30 AM DOT 216	Public Hearing on State Management Plan and Needs		OPTIONAL
February 6	12:30 PM – 3:30 DOT 216	Steering Committee Meeting #4	Review Needs and Progress Report	REQUIRED
April 8	9:00 AM – Noon DOT 216	Steering Committee Meeting #5	Progress Report	REQUIRED
April 8	1:00 PM – 3:30 PM DOT 216	Volunteer Expert Meeting	Share ideas on current activities and future directions	NOT REQUIRED
April 10	9:00 AM – Noon DOT 216	Urban Transit Provider Working Group	Explore ideas on future	NOT REQUIRED
May 6	9:00 AM to 3:00 PM DOT 216	Volunteer Summit	Share ideas on current activities and future directions	NOT REQUIRED
August 21	9:00 AM – Noon DOT 216	Steering Committee Meeting #6	Presentation of Draft Report	REQUIRED
September 18	9:00 AM – Noon DOT 216	Steering Committee Meeting #7	Review of Draft Report	REQUIRED
October 21	9:00 AM – 11:30 AM DOT 216	Public Hearing on Draft Plan		OPTIONAL
October 21	12:30 PM – 3:30 DOT 216	Steering Committee Meeting #8	Review Comments and Document	REQUIRED
January 8, 2015	9:00 AM – 11:30 AM DOT 216	Public Hearing on Final Plan		OPTIONAL
January 8	12:30 PM – 3:30 DOT 216	Steering Committee Meeting #9	End of project January 31, 2015	REQUIRED