

South Portland Bus Service

Contact Information

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Service Summary

Service area:	City of South Portland, parts of Portland and Scarborough
Type of service:	Fixed route

City Bus Service

The South Portland Bus Service (SPBS), which is owned and operated by the City of South Portland, provides fixed route transit service to the City of South Portland and includes stops in Scarborough and downtown Portland.

The South Portland Bus Service operates three routes. All three loop through residential streets, providing access to commercial areas as well as downtown Portland.

- **Route 21 Willard Square.** This route begins at Pillsbury Street and Cottage Road. Major stops on the inbound to Portland portion of the route include SMCC, Ferry Village - High Street and Sawyer Street, Mill Creek Transit Hub, and Forest and Congress Street in Portland. Major stops on the outbound to Willard Square and SMCC portion of the route include Forest and Congress Street, Mill Creek Transit Hub, Ocean Street and Sawyer Street, and Pillsbury Street and Cottage Road. Weekdays, the bus runs from 6:35 a.m. to 11:15 p.m. On Saturdays and Sundays, the bus runs from 6:40 a.m. to 6:40 p.m.
- **Route 24A Maine Mall via Main Street.** This route begins at Redbank. Major stops on the inbound to Portland via Main Street portion of the route include Gannett Drive, Running Hill Road, Maine Mall JC Penney, Redbank, Main Street and Westbrook Street, Cash Corner on Main Street, Broadway at Evans Street, Mill Creek Transit Hib, and Forest and Congress Street. Major stops on the outbound to Maine Mall via Main Street include Forest and Congress Street, Mill Creek Transit Hub, Broadway at Evans Street, Cash Corner on Main Street, Main Street and Westbrook Street, Redbank, Maine Mall JC Penney and Walmart. Weekdays, the bus runs from 5:20 a.m. to 11:15 p.m. On Saturdays and Sundays, the bus runs from 7:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.
- **Route 24B Maine Mall via Community Center.** This route begins at the Mill Street Transit Hub. Major stops on the inbound to Portland via Community Center portion of the route include Gannett Drive, Maine Mall JC Penney, Brick Hill Redbank, Cash Corner on Broadway, Community Center Highland, Mill Creek Transit Hub, and Forest and Congress Street. Major stops on the outbound to Maine Mall via Community Center include Forest and Congress Street, Mill Creek

Transit Hub, Highland Community Center, Cash Corner on Broadway, Brick Hill Redbank, Maine Mall JC Penney, and Walmart. Weekdays, the bus runs from 6:20 a.m. to 9:45 p.m. There is no weekend service.

Summary of Service Changes

1. **Sunday bus service.** Service on Routes 24A and 21 has been extended from six days per week (Monday through Saturday), to seven.
2. **Evening and weekend service.** The buses run in the evening five days per week until 11:45 p.m. On weekends, service is from 6:30 a.m. until 6:30 p.m.
3. **Knightville Area.** Service has been restored to the Knightville area on Route 21 after a period of four years without service.

Summary of Accomplishments

1. **New headquarters facility.** The South Portland Bus Service (SPBS) moved to a new, up-to-date headquarters/maintenance facility that also houses the Public Works and Parks and Recreation and Waterfront Departments. The new facility includes office space, a conference room, a maintenance bay for buses, a wash facility, and facilities to house bus and Public Works personnel during inclement weather.
2. **AVL system.** SPBS has an AVL system on all its buses, as well as upgraded cameras.
3. **Fleet.** SPBS has upgraded its fleet. The oldest bus is six years old.
4. **Ridership.** Ridership has increased, while fares remained the same. Approximately 28% of the ridership consists of people travelling to Southern Maine Community College in South Portland.

Future Priorities

1. **Route 24B.** Establish Sunday service on Route 24B.
2. **Route 24A.** Expand service to the Saco border with a one-hour headway.
3. **Route 21.** Route 21 currently has 15 minutes of downtime during the run. SPBS is exploring possible extension of this route to Casco Bay Ferry or to the University of Southern Maine.
4. **New buses.** Purchase new buses in 2022.

Plans and Studies

SPBS works with the PACTS transit committee on developing and updating a 6-year plan for transit. SPBS conducts its own planning for the bus system on an on-going basis by monitoring the AVL system, conducting route simulations, and by analyzing on-time performance, route deviations and delays. Several

years ago, a community survey was emailed to households within South Portland concerning South Portland Bus Service schedule and route changes.

Ridership

Ridership has increased since FY 2013, with minor fluctuations on a year-to-year basis, as shown in the following table. ADA trips are provided by RTP.

South Portland Bus Service Fixed Route Trips						
	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018
General Public	263,457	276,087	288,088	270,426	270,930	273,167
ADA	1,846	2,190	1,712	1,636	4,994	4,717
Total	265,303	278,277	289,800	272,062	275,924	277,884

Fares

Fare	\$1.50 one-way
Exact Fare Required?	Yes
Electronic Fare?	No
Senior/disabled Half fare available?	Yes
Senior/disabled half fare pass required?	No, but must show Medicare card or disabled ID.
Other discounts?	\$1.25 student with proper ID 10-ride tickets \$13.50; student \$11.25; senior/disabled \$6.75 Monthly pass \$45.00
Multi-ride prepayment?	Yes
Monthly pass prepayment?	Yes
Passes available from:	City Hall, Hannaford at Mill Creek, Hannaford at Maine Mall. Monthly bus pass also available at Metro sales outlets. 10-ride tickets also available at Mill Creek Shaws.

Buses/Facilities

As mentioned previously, SPBS is now headquartered in a new, up-to-date office and maintenance facility that is shared with the South Portland Public Works and Parks and Recreation and Waterfront Departments.

The Gillig buses are in good condition, but there have been problems with the Cummins engines (the only engine approved by EPA for use with Gillig buses). Most bus breakdowns are due to engine problems. SPBS spends roughly \$60,000 to \$70,000 per year on engine maintenance.

SPBS runs four buses at any one time. If there is a breakdown, another driver can go to the hub or site of the breakdown and continue the route. All of the drivers have cell phones and are on call. SPBS employs about 15 drivers, but there is a high turnover rate so the total keeps changing.

Coordination/Outreach/Partnerships/Unmet Needs

In terms of unmet need, many seniors in South Portland need door-to-door transportation. Also, there are some areas of the city that are not on the bus line. If more funding was available, SPBS would decrease headways and add more routes.

Innovations/Creative Approaches

SPBS places a high priority on public outreach to groups and organizations helping people with transportation needs, as set forth in the section on public participation.

Major Challenges

1. **Cummins engine.** The Cummins engines have not been as reliable as they should be but are the only EPA-approved option for the Gillig buses at this time.
2. **Drivers.** Driver recruitment and retention continue to be ongoing challenges, in part because of a low unemployment rate in the greater Portland area, and a corresponding availability of higher paying jobs. The starting pay for drivers is \$16.70/hour plus benefits and can go as high as \$23/hour. SPBS also pays overtime.

Public Participation Summary

1. The South Portland Bus Service attended and participated in the Region 6 Transit Workshop on October 27, 2016, at the City of Portland Library.
2. Mobility Advisory Committee concerning complementary paratransit services hosted by Regional Transportation Program (RTP).
3. Monthly meetings and annual public forum of the PACTS Planning Committee to evaluate current transit services and mobility management for low-income, elderly, and disabled individuals and the general public. Regional Route Study Public Meeting to collect information on proposed recommendations to improve bus service in the greater Portland region.
4. Knightville/Mill Creek Public Informational Meetings concerning impact of parking and transit service on neighborhood residents and businesses.
5. Land use and planning workshops during review of the City's stakeholder participation in GPCOG's Sustainability Program, specifically to describe and encourage principles of transit oriented development.

6. Southern Maine Community College and University of Southern Maine open house.
7. Presentations to staff and residents of “E Street house” in Knightville, specialized housing for adult children with developmental disabilities, giving them transit options and an opportunity to secure a safe, supported and active community life. (Ongoing)
8. Kaler Elementary School classroom presentations and hands-on experience riding the bus.
9. Day One Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, a teen counseling center dealing with teen drug and alcohol abuse. (Ongoing – whenever bus schedule changes or they request information).
10. Red Bank Village Community Center “Take Back the Night” to discuss bus schedules and transportation options. This neighborhood is in a Community Development Block Grant eligible census tract.
11. One-on-one specialized training and material for disabled or visually impaired customers, as well as service animal training. Ongoing upon request.
12. Community Survey e-mailed to households within South Portland concerning South Portland Bus Service schedule and route changes.
13. City Council Workshops and Meetings concerning approvals of existing and proposed route changes, approval of capital items acquisition, and Operating Budgets and resulting service levels.
14. Annual August meeting with South Portland School Department Child Services Coordinator to discuss the upcoming school year and low-income family access to bus tickets for school transportation.
15. Monthly meetings with City of South Portland General Assistance Director to discuss client need for bus tickets for the following month.
16. Monthly meetings at Redbank Community Center Hub with Families Coordinator to discuss low income residents in need of assistance for bus tickets.
17. Monthly or Bi-monthly meetings with City of Portland Department of Human Services Housing Coordinator to discuss the need for bus tickets for clients who will be temporarily housed in South Portland.
18. 20 E Street - Home ownership project for individuals with developmental disabilities. Meet with House Coordinator and new residents on how to use the bus system while living in South Portland.
19. Six public forums within city neighborhoods in February 2018, to solicit public comments on the operation of the bus system.

SPBS also makes available one-on-one training to help passengers with special needs to learn how to navigate the transit system.