

# MaineDOT Low-No Grant Application

## **Attachment N**

### **Public and Stakeholder Involvement Documents**



# Public Involvement Plan

March 2021

# Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making

Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT)

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# **1.0 Introduction**

Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making is intended to strengthen and document how MaineDOT engages people and communities throughout the state. It outlines the public involvement process MaineDOT uses to engage a broad array of stakeholders in statewide transportation planning, project design and development, and construction or maintenance activities. Additionally, MaineDOT is committed to reaching out to communities and people who have historically lacked access to the decision-

making process or been underserved by our transportation system.

Maine residents, municipalities, counties, Municipal Planning Organizations, Regional Planning Organizations, Native American Nations, public transportation authorities, businesses, and nonprofits, along with state and federal agencies, participate with MaineDOT in shaping transportation decisions. The involvement of these stakeholders takes different forms: planning and consulting work, public meetings, or written comments and agency review. Our goal is to create meaningful opportunities for participation with transparency and accountability in decision-making.

MaineDOT will refine and improve its public involvement program over time, with feedback from our customers – the users of Maine’s transportation system.

### **1.1 MaineDOT’s Vision, Mission, Core Values, and Goals (Strategic Plan)**

In 2012, MaineDOT developed [The MaineDOT Strategic Plan](#) to establish a department-wide framework for the strategic direction and operation of the department. Updated every two years, the plan is a practical roadmap intended to guide the department’s operational policies, decisions, and expectations for the foreseeable future. The [2016 revision](#) integrated the individual strategies with a more comprehensive asset management approach. It also reaffirmed that, after four years, these goals continue to be the three guideposts that steer MaineDOT’s decisions and activities.

Meaningful public involvement can contribute positively to the department’s overall vision, mission, core values, and goals.

**VISION:** To be the most trusted organization in Maine.

**MISSION:** To support economic opportunity and quality of life by responsibly providing our customers the safest and most reliable transportation system possible, given available resources.

**CORE VALUES:** Integrity – Competence – Service

#### **GOALS:**

- **Manage the Existing System:** Effectively manage Maine’s existing transportation system for safety and effectiveness within reliable funding levels.
- **Support Economic Opportunity:** Wisely invest available resources to support economic opportunity for our customers.
- **Build Trust:** Demonstrate our core values of integrity, competence, and service,

both individually and organizationally.

## **1.2 Why Public Involvement is Important**

According to the Federal Highway Administration website, “Public participation is an integral part of the transportation planning process that helps to ensure that decisions are made in consideration of and to benefit public needs and preferences.”

Transportation agencies provide opportunities for public involvement in the planning and decision-making processes in order to accomplish multiple purposes, including to:

- Obtain Quality Input and Involvement – Comments that are relevant, constructive, and will contribute to better decisions, plans, policies, programs, and projects.
- Provide Opportunity to Build Consensus – An effective public involvement process can facilitate and increase public support for specific, recommended actions.
- Ensure Accessibility – Public participation opportunities that are geographically, physically, temporally, linguistically, and culturally accessible help ensure that every stakeholder has a voice.
- Ensure Diversity – Good transportation planning elicits a range of socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural perspectives, including from people who reside in low-income and minority neighborhoods and from other traditionally underserved communities.
- Establish and Maintain Partnerships – Partnerships with communities and community-based organizations can help create long-term support for the projects, programs, and activities of the transportation agency.
- Foster Participant Satisfaction – People who take the time to participate deserve assurances that joining the discussion and providing feedback are worthwhile endeavors.
- Clearly Define the Potential for Influence – A well-crafted public involvement process effectively communicates where and how participants can influence decisions.
- Establish the Department’s Commitment – Regular communication by the transportation agency can help establish trust with affected communities and help build community capacity to provide quality public input.
- Establish Relevance – Effective public involvement processes help frame issues so that the significance and potential impacts are well understood by participants.

## **2.0 Requirements for Public Involvement**

### **2.1 Federal Public Involvement Requirements**

The principles of public involvement are comparable across those federal agencies that regulate state DOTs and disburse federal funds for transportation. Federal

requirements concerning public participation in statewide transportation decision-making are specified in Title 23 and Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), in the Passenger Rail Improvement and Investment Act of 2008, in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and in other federal laws and regulations. Federal requirements generally leave the choice of methods for facilitating participation to the discretion of each state but require that public participation processes provide:

- Early and continuing opportunities for public involvement.
- Open public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and at convenient times.
- Timely and complete information on transportation issues and decision-making processes.
- Reasonable access to technical and policy information.
- Information electronically accessible on the Internet.
- Adequate notice of public involvement opportunities and time for review and comment at key decision points.
- Procedures for demonstrating explicit consideration of and responses to public input.
- A process for soliciting and considering the needs of traditionally underserved populations.
- Visualization techniques to describe proposed plans and studies.
- Opportunities for collaborative input on alternatives.
- An allotment of time for review of and written comment in the development of long-range plans and transportation improvement programs before new procedures, major revisions to existing procedures, or investment programs are adopted.
- Periodic review and evaluation of the public participation process.

Title 23, Ch. 450 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) establishes the fundamental public involvement requirements for the Federal-Aid Highway Program, which is administered by the FHWA, and also for the programs of the Federal Transit Administration. This section of Title 23 requires states to “develop and use a documented public involvement process that provides opportunities for public review and comment at key decision points.” The main provisions of these requirements in federal code are consistent with the elements enumerated above – early and continuous opportunities, access to information, adequate public notice, convenient meeting locations, electronic availability of information, consideration of traditionally underserved communities, and periodic review of the public involvement process. This section of federal code is the original impetus for all states to develop public involvement plans. It is MaineDOT’s policy and practice to satisfy these requirements using the techniques and strategies identified in this plan.

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) regulations also require states to involve public and private stakeholders – including private railroads that own rail-related

infrastructure – in development and review of state rail plans. These stakeholders must be notified and given the opportunity to provide input on the State Rail Plan as it is being prepared, with reasonable time allowed for public and stakeholder review. The occasions and times for public involvement during State Rail Plan development are determined by states in collaboration with the public and stakeholders. States are encouraged to incorporate the public involvement associated with State Rail Plan development within the public involvement processes established for the overall statewide/non-metropolitan planning process, with the inclusion of a range of interested stakeholder groups, including, for example, the state freight advisory committees encouraged by MAP-21 (the current federal surface transportation authorization act).

The Federal Aviation Administration provides the following goals and tasks for grant applications:

- Provide active, early, and continuous public involvement and reasonable public access to information that accurately describes a proposed project and its environmental effects.
- Ask for and consider public input on plans, proposals, alternatives, impacts, and mitigation.
- Use public involvement techniques designed to meet the needs of different interest groups and individuals.
- Promote an active public role to lessen potentially adverse community reaction to the agency actions needed to ensure safe, efficient aviation.

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA) is a national policy that endeavors to prevent or minimize the adverse impacts to the environment that may be caused by activities with a federal nexus and to promote the health and welfare of citizens when those federal actions occur. NEPA is a decision-making process that engages with the public on potential environmental impacts, collects and integrates public feedback in decision-making, and informs the public of how decisions are made with regards to proposed impacts to the environment. The NEPA process involves an evaluation of a set of alternatives and their associated environmental impacts. MaineDOT is obligated to satisfy a federal requirement for public involvement and opportunities for public hearings in the NEPA process, including FHWA requirements to maintain a public involvement process, and it is the department's practice to satisfy the law and its underlying intent. Pursuant to 23 USC 128 and 23 CFR 771.111, public involvement procedures must provide for:

- Coordination of public-involvement activities and public hearings.
- Early and continuing opportunities for the public to be involved in the identification of social, economic, and environmental impacts as well as impacts associated with relocation of individuals, groups, or institutions.
- One or more public hearings or the opportunity for a hearing or hearings for any federal-aid project that:
  - Requires significant amounts of property acquisition.



- Substantially changes the layout or functions of connecting roadways or of the facility being improved.
- Has a substantial adverse impact on abutting property.
- Has a significant social, economic, environmental, or other effect.
- The federal agency has determined should have a public hearing because it is in the public interest.

MaineDOT conscientiously observes the NEPA-related FHWA requirements for planning processes and studies and the development of road and bridge improvement projects.

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) requires federal agencies to weigh the effects of their projects on historic properties and afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment. The responsible federal agency first determines whether it has an undertaking that is a type of activity that could affect historic properties. Historic properties are those that are included in the National Register of Historic Places or that meet the criteria for the National Register. During project development, the department will send notifications to the tribes and the municipalities, requesting information about historic properties as part of Section 106 consultation. These consultations are coordinated with the appropriate State Historic Preservation Officer/Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO/THPO) to determine eligibility. If properties are determined eligible, the department will coordinate with the department's project manager to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts to National Register-eligible or listed properties. Depending on the community interest, the department and the SHPO may hold public meetings to share project information and receive public comment.

## **2.2 State Public Involvement Requirements**

Maine's Sensible Transportation Policy Act (STPA) was enacted by voter referendum in 1991; the STPA's Administrative Rule was updated most recently in 2008. The law and rule require a planning process that: provides meaningful public involvement opportunities; acknowledges the diverse transportation needs of Maine people; and considers transportation efficiency, energy conservation, and the effects of transportation on the environment. The STPA stipulates that transportation planning decisions and project decisions must minimize the harmful effects of transportation on public health and that a full range of reasonable transportation alternatives be evaluated for all significant highway construction or reconstruction projects. The STPA further requires that preference be given to transportation system management options, demand management strategies, improvements to the existing system, and other transportation modes before increasing highway capacity.

Regarding public involvement, the STPA requires that MaineDOT incorporate a public participation process in which local governmental bodies and the general public have timely notice and opportunities to identify and comment on concerns related to

transportation project and planning decisions. MaineDOT and the Maine Turnpike Authority are required to take the comments and concerns into account and must respond to them in a timely fashion. Additional details about the Maine Sensible Transportation Policy Act can be found [here](#).

### **3.0 Identifying the Public**

#### **3.1 Tailoring Outreach to Underserved People**

Many people in minority and low-income communities, as well as those with low literacy and/or limited English proficiency, have traditionally been underserved by conventional outreach methods. Reaching out to traditionally underserved groups helps ensure that all customers and stakeholders have opportunities to influence the decision-making process. It sets the tone for subsequent project activities and promotes a spirit of inclusion. MaineDOT meeting planners strive to encourage attendance among groups protected by anti-discrimination laws with which MaineDOT is required to comply. This tailoring of outreach efforts is particularly useful because it:

- Provides fresh perspectives to project planners and developers.
- Gives MaineDOT information about community-specific issues and concerns.
- Allows MaineDOT to identify potential conflicts.
- Offers feedback on how to get underserved communities involved.
- Increases the likelihood that solutions ultimately selected are those which best meet the needs of these communities.

To maximize the effectiveness of the department's public participation efforts in engaging underserved populations, MaineDOT staff is committed to:

- Planning public meetings and hearings well in advance and publicizing them in diverse media, flyers, and on the MaineDOT website.
- Ensuring that meeting notices state that the meeting uses accessible-format materials.
- Determining the existence of non-English languages and other cultural characteristics that could inhibit public participation and offering appropriate accommodations to reduce any barriers.
- Accepting both verbal and written comments in languages other than English.
- Holding meetings and conducting outreach in the affected neighborhoods, using community centers as meeting locations and venues for informal outreach.
- Using varied meeting times and locations to accommodate the schedule, transportation, and childcare limitations of community members.
- Holding meetings at convenient locations that are accessible and welcoming to all, including those with disabilities. This includes providing appropriate room setup and, when requested, alternate formats of handouts (e.g., large-print materials) and audio equipment.

- Making available alternative methods for the two-way flow of information and input between MaineDOT and people who are not likely to attend meetings.
- Using various illustration and visualization techniques to convey the project information including, but not limited to, charts, graphs, photos, maps, and the Internet.
- Reaching out to others – both internally and externally – with expertise in contacting and connecting with underserved populations to obtain advice and information about best practices and effective techniques

### 3.2 Environmental Justice

In 1994, the administration of President Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 12899 – [Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations](#). Under this order, transportation agencies are required to make achieving Environmental Justice part of their mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations. Environmental Justice initiatives accomplish this goal by involving the potentially affected public in developing transportation projects that fit harmoniously within their communities without sacrificing safety or mobility.

MaineDOT complies with EJ requirements by:

- Updating the [State's Demographic Profile](#) every three years to determine where low-income, non-native, and minority populations reside. The most recent profile was completed in 2014.
- Updating U.S. Census Data every three years and conducting a “Four-Factor Analysis” to determine Limited English Proficiency (LEP) population concentrations around the state.

During planning and project development, MaineDOT will use the following tools to the maximum extent possible to engage minority and low-income populations:

- Utilizing EPA's EJ Mapper to identify populations in the project area.
- Ensuring the participation of identified minority and low-income populations located within the limits of a proposed project by holding meetings that are close to or adjacent to the project areas.
- Providing good access for public participation – holding public forums and meetings at facilities that are ADA-accessible and providing translation services requested for non-English speaking populations when they are requested.
- Providing adequate notice of virtual or in-person meetings that are accessible to low-income populations/limited Internet population (e.g., providing meeting materials in a mobile phone accessible format and/or placing meeting notices at town halls, libraries, and schools).
- Designating and training Environmental Justice liaisons – ensuring that they are knowledgeable about the EJ requirements of federal agencies.

## 4.0 Public Involvement Tools and Techniques

### 4.1 Virtual Public Involvement/On-Demand Public Meetings

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, MaineDOT stopped holding in-person public meetings in March 2020. The department had already been evaluating tools and techniques related to supplementing existing public involvement processes with virtual public involvement tools; the pandemic accelerated that need and resulted in the quick development of virtual meetings. Many of the tools below were utilized to create this method.

During initial discussions, MaineDOT determine its best choice would be to create on-demand public meetings as opposed to trying to hold live virtual meetings over Zoom or some other live-streaming program. The on-demand process consists of recording videos of the types of presentations that would typically be given at an in-person meeting. The videos, along with other documentation helpful for the public to understand the project, are loaded into a StoryMap accessed by the MaineDOT website. A StoryMap is an ArcGIS product that helps to tell stories using text, videos, maps, and other content. The StoryMap allows members of the public to view all the presentations or only those parts that are relevant to them. As an example, a property owner on the project may wish to view the complete presentation, especially the section on the right-of-way. In contrast, someone who travels through the project area may only want to consider the areas related to traffic impacts. The StoryMap was developed to allow for use by desktop, tablets, and mobile phones. Below is an example of a StoryMap describing a project. A recent integration between ArcGIS StoryMaps and the Public Involvement Management Application (PIMA), to be discussed in more detail below, allows for the ability to comment from within the StoryMap.



On-demand public meetings have numerous benefits over live-streamed and in-person meetings. The on-demand meeting allows the members of the public to view the meeting at any time that is convenient for them. It does not



require them to log in or attend at a specific time. Neither department staff members nor members of the public need to travel to a physical location. On-demand public meetings also provide for a consistent message regarding the project by posting the information and leaving it posted even after the comment period ends. One potential downside of not having a dialogue during a live or streamed meeting is resolved by the ability for the public to comment and for MaineDOT staff to respond through the Public Involvement Management Application (PIMA). This tool will be discussed further below.



The public notices for each project direct people to the MaineDOT Virtual Public Involvement website: [www.maine.gov/mdot/vpi/](http://www.maine.gov/mdot/vpi/). The Virtual Public Involvement site has a video explaining the process and lists all projects with an active Virtual Public Meeting. For each project, the site lists the timeframe (typically two weeks) that the project is accepting comments. After that comment period, the project information can still be viewed at the Public Meeting Library page: [www.maine.gov/mdot/vpi/library/](http://www.maine.gov/mdot/vpi/library/).

As this new process was being developed, it was determined that we should be able to accommodate comments from people who may not have Internet or mobile access. While all public notices now include a link directing people to view the virtual meeting, the notices still include contact information (mailing address, email address, and phone number) for the project manager. Additionally, MaineDOT posts physical meeting notices in town halls, libraries, and schools. This allows those without Internet and mobile access to contact the project manager via multiple methods to learn about the project.

While this process still accommodates people who may have limited technological access, this new method helps to engage and include many more people, allowing MaineDOT to learn more information from the public and to make better decisions. Having all active public meetings on one page allows members of the public to see projects they may not have known about in any other way and enables them to see the brief presentation and make applicable comments. Also, in addition to the typical notices and the website, each virtual meeting now will be listed on MaineDOT's social media platforms and will include targeted ads to reach users who may have comments. These methods have already resulted in significant increases in both the number of people reached and the number of comments received compared to previous in-person meetings. Because of the benefits of the on-demand meetings, this method will still be the primary way of holding public meetings after the pandemic.

## 4.2 MaineDOT Website

[MaineDOT's Internet website](#) is intended to further MaineDOT's mission by providing relevant, timely, and easily accessible information and resources, thereby supporting effective public involvement. The website is designed to be user-focused, easy to navigate, and up to date. The website offers the public continuous access to information and the ability to offer input or ask questions at any time. The website provides a variety of information from the bureaus and offices of the department and provides a means for the public to contribute input on transportation plans, programs, policies, and projects. Comments and inquiries will be directed to the relevant bureau or office in the department for timely responses. The department policy is to respond to inquiries submitted to the website within two business days.

### 4.3 Use of Social Media

Social media is an essential means of reaching people. MaineDOT maintains a robust presence on its Facebook ([@MaineDOT](#)), Instagram ([@mainedot1](#)), and Twitter ([@MaineDOT1](#)) pages. The department uses social media to post virtual public meeting announcements, disseminate public information, and feature events. Posts about key publications (such as the annual Work Plan) encourage public comment. Facebook and Twitter are used for significant construction-project announcements or unexpected traffic delays due to highway incidents. When a new project or initiative, (e.g., a customer satisfaction survey) is launched, MaineDOT provides a link to the appropriate webpage, where there is typically a project-specific “comments” option that is cross-posted via all platforms. The public input received will either go directly to the project manager or to an appropriate employee for response.



### 4.4 MetroQuest

MetroQuest is an upgraded survey tool that allows for multiple types of issues and questions. It is much more graphics-focused than a typical survey. It has several preset tabs that allow for various types of questions and graphics. Some of these include budget allocation, tradeoffs, priority ranking, map marker, and scenario rating. It is best suited for longer-term surveys that are more likely to be used by the Bureau of Planning. MaineDOT has partnered with the Metropolitan Planning Organizations to allow them also to use the tool. Below are some examples and views of actual surveys from MaineDOT, PACTs, and KACTS.





#### 4.5 Turning Point

Turning Point is a tool that is primarily used as a supplement at an in-person meeting. It consists of a physical “clicker” device; those at an in-person meeting can click their answer to a question that has been posed. The Turning Point software consists of an add-on to PowerPoint. Questions can be added to the presentation by MaineDOT staff before the meeting. Turning Point’s advantages are that it is anonymous and that it gives each attendee an equal vote that is not swayed by others. It also offers instant feedback by showing the results after the question period has ended. The downside to this tool is the reliance on an in-person meeting. This tool is not being used during the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also receive limited use post-pandemic since most public meetings will still be held using the on-demand process.

#### 4.6 Public Involvement Management Application (PIMA)

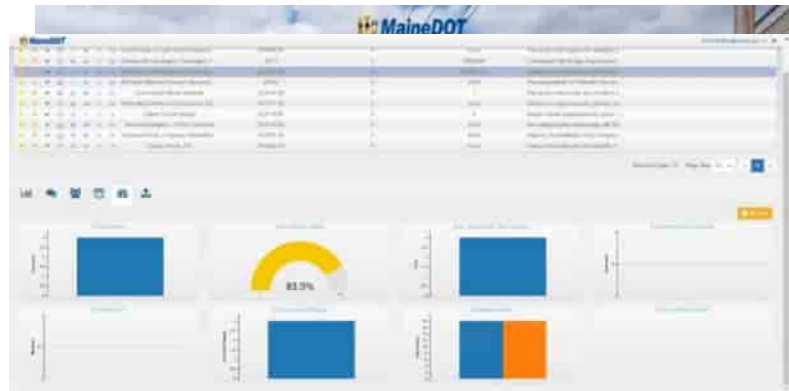
The PIMA application is a tool that was initially developed by IowaDOT to help improve public engagement. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, MaineDOT immediately contracted with the consultant that worked with IowaDOT to build our own program. While PIMA was

not developed initially as a virtual public involvement tool, we developed PIMA to be a critical part of our virtual public involvement toolbox. The integration of PIMA into the virtual public involvement process is discussed above in section 4.1. What follows will describe the other aspects of PIMA that could be utilized for any type of meeting.



PIMA is a platform that allows for better management and coordination of public involvement and engagement. There are a few components of the application that help to increase public participation and engagement, including an easy process for capturing public input, the ability for continued dialogue between the public and staff, transparency and accountability for what we say, analysis and adjustment based on data, and the ability to reach more people and stakeholders throughout the life of a project.

As described above, the integration of the ArcGIS StoryMaps and PIMA allows for easy commenting while viewing the content within the StoryMap for our on-demand meetings. The comment form allows a user to type his or her comment; specify a topic or topics related to that comment; ask for a response to



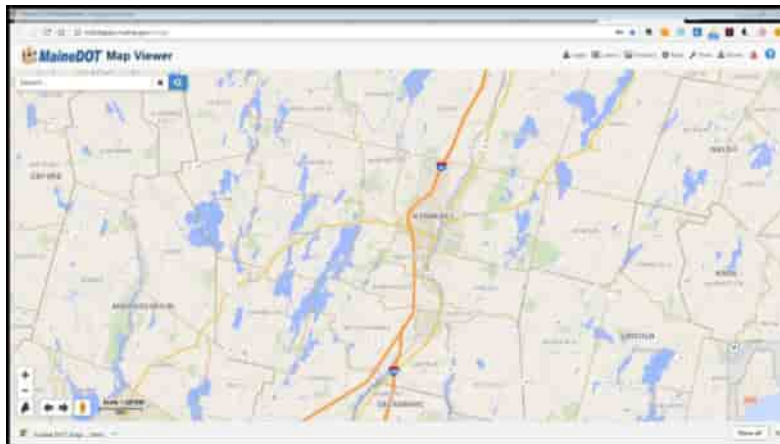
the comment through email, phone, or mail; show a specific mapped location related to the comment; and show his or her level of support for the project. If a commenter requests a response to a comment or question, that request will show up in the PIMA application. Staff can also be notified by email when a comment occurs with the actual comment included, as shown below. The project manager can go into PIMA to answer the comment or can request another team member help with the response prior to submittal. Once a response is generated, it can be submitted back to the commenter. All comments and responses are saved within the program and can be seen by all MaineDOT staff with access to the program. This will typically consist of project team members and managers. An example of a comment thread is shown to the right. This allows staff to be transparent and accountable to their comments. Once a project is completed, all comments can be exported and saved in accordance with MaineDOT's retention policy.

The program consists of a dashboard that allows tracking of metrics for individual projects and groups of projects. Those metrics include project favorability, average response time, and stakeholder types. The use of the website, use of social media, and adding stakeholders directly to the application allows for keeping and retaining involvement throughout the life of a project.

#### 4.7 Geographic Information Systems (GIS)



MaineDOT uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) primarily for internal data integration and analysis, inventory, and communications. GIS also provides an effective means for external communication and public involvement. Since the department's beginnings, static maps have provided the public with information about specific locations, such as



individual project sites. In recent years, MaineDOT has increasingly used online GIS mapping tools such as the [MaineDOT Map Viewer](#) to provide infrastructure and investment information to the public as well as to planning and operational partners. The Map Viewer provides Internet users with access to map-based information about Maine's transportation infrastructure and associated MaineDOT work. Well-designed static map images and paper maps shown at public meetings and in publications can also help agencies and the public better understand a project and potential issues. Using GIS web pages (such as Map Viewer) for project-level public involvement allows the audience to navigate an interactive map of the project area, view data layers of interest, and perform simple searches using a common web browser. This webpage enables customers to review proposed project plans and provide comments directly to the project manager. The [Map Viewer](#) is accessible using MaineDOT's website and through several context-specific topics such as the [Work Plan](#), [Posted Roads](#), [Construction Advertise Plan](#), and [Construction Advertise Schedule](#) webpages.

## 5.0 Public Involvement from Planning to Programming a Project

### 5.1 Maine's Long-Range Transportation Plan

Federal and state laws require that every state develop a long-range statewide transportation plan to set out a vision for the future of the state transportation system, to identify the needs of the system, and to propose how best to meet those needs. Maine's next long-range statewide transportation plan – Maine's Long-Range Transportation Plan 2050 (LRTP) – will be a statewide, comprehensive, multimodal transportation plan that sets forth goals, objectives and strategies for MaineDOT to pursue in response to Maine's transportation needs. The LRTP will tie together the department's "family of plans" – the various modal plans developed by the department – to plan for future investment and to satisfy federal and state requirements. The LRTP will be primarily a policy document and, in general, does not identify specific transportation improvement projects.

MaineDOT will update the LRTP periodically to meet the state requirement of a long-range multimodal plan with a planning horizon of at least 10 years and the federal (FHWA and FTA) requirements of a long-range plan with a planning horizon of at least

20 years. MaineDOT's LRTP will evaluate and make recommendations for investments in Maine's transportation systems:

- Highways and bridges.
- Public transportation, including local and intercity buses, passenger rail, ferries, and airports.
- Sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities.
- Bicycle lanes and other bicycle facilities.
- Marine facilities, including access to them.
- Freight rail and motor carriers.
- Transportation system management, such as ridesharing.
- Scenic, historic, and natural resource connections with transportation systems.
- Current and emerging technological innovations relative to transportation.

MaineDOT will provide notice to the public of its intent to publish or update the LRTP. The notice will be posted online at [www.mainedot.gov](http://www.mainedot.gov) and by mailings or e-mail notices to municipal officials and known parties of interest. Notices will also be sent to the applicable Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and tribal governments.

In early 2015, the department's Outreach Office conducted statewide listening sessions – "Talking Transportation" – to gather public input for the LRTP as well as to pioneer a format for periodic, non-project-specific interactions with the general public. Meetings were held at convenient times and at a variety of locations that were accessible and selected to attract a cross section of citizens, business representatives, and municipal stakeholders. Public announcements of these meetings were published in newspapers of regional interest and on the MaineDOT website. Notices were also sent to RPOs, MPOs, and tribal governments, and these groups were also engaged to inform other interested parties about the meetings.

Throughout 2018, MaineDOT met with numerous state agencies and stakeholder groups to obtain input on Maine's Long-Range Transportation Plan 2050. A MetroQuest Survey was launched to the general public to gauge the public's perception of trends affecting transportation. The survey was posted on MaineDOT's website, with links to it on social media, as well as in flyers mailed to 20 communities around the state. Valuable data and public input were collected as part of this effort and will help shape this plan.

These sessions served as forums to discuss the condition of the state's transportation system (all modes), to define system deficiencies, and to identify alternative solutions and overall transportation system priorities, all in the context of anticipated funding availability. The information obtained through this public engagement technique will be incorporated into the LRTP draft document. In the future, similar meetings may also occur in association with the development of other transportation planning documents or programs.

Once in draft form, the LRTP will be made available to the public through notices in statewide newspapers of record, social media marketing, and by publication of the plan on the MaineDOT website with interactive features. MaineDOT will also make the draft available to RPOs, MPOs, tribal governments, MaineDOT Region Offices, and state

depository libraries. After giving due consideration to all the public comments received, MaineDOT will publish the final LRTP and will post it on the department's website.

### **5.2 Consultative Planning Process for Non-Metropolitan Local Officials**

In line with federal requirements, MaineDOT has developed Consultative Planning Process for Non-Metropolitan Local Officials to document and obtain input on the processes by which MaineDOT consults with municipal officials. This document, finalized in 2011, describes the statewide planning process, plans, and planning tools. Specifically, the plan also outlines the activities of the Maine Local Roads Center, Maine Roads Scholar Program, and Locally Administered Projects. The plan also describes how and with whom local officials can communicate the transportation needs and concerns of their communities.

### **5.3 Major Studies**

MaineDOT conducts major studies to evaluate potential new or expanded transportation facilities when potential investments could result in significant environmental impacts or when directed by the Maine Legislature. Major studies must be conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Maine Sensible Transportation Policy Act (STPA), and if any project phase relies on federal funds or requires a federal action, with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Major studies include transportation feasibility studies, Environmental Assessments (EAs), and Environmental Impact Statements (EISs). Each major study will have a project-specific public involvement process. Examples of public involvement techniques used for major studies include steering and stakeholder advisory committees, Internet sites, business surveys, formal public meetings, and newsletters. MaineDOT will contact municipal representatives, RPOs, MPOs, tribal governments, environmental and historic groups, and others within the project study area to identify customers and stakeholders wanting to be involved in the study. A steering committee may be convened to provide meaningful input to MaineDOT throughout the study effort. The steering committee identifies potential stakeholders who may then be invited to serve on the study-specific stakeholder committee. A formal study-specific Public Involvement Plan is developed, and frequently, a neutral public involvement facilitator is retained to ensure complete and continuous public involvement throughout the study.

### **5.4 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a procedural statute that requires an assessment of the social, economic, and environmental impacts of proposed Federal actions. NEPA is a decision-making process that engages with the public on potential social, economic, and environmental impacts; collects and integrates public feedback in decision-making; and informs the public of how decisions are made with regards to proposed impacts. The NEPA process involves an evaluation of a set of alternatives and their associated impacts. MaineDOT is obligated to satisfy a federal requirement for public involvement and opportunities for public hearings in the NEPA process, including FHWA requirements to maintain a public involvement process, and it is the department's practice to satisfy the law and its underlying intent. Pursuant to 23 USC 128 and 23 CFR 771.111, public involvement procedures must provide for:

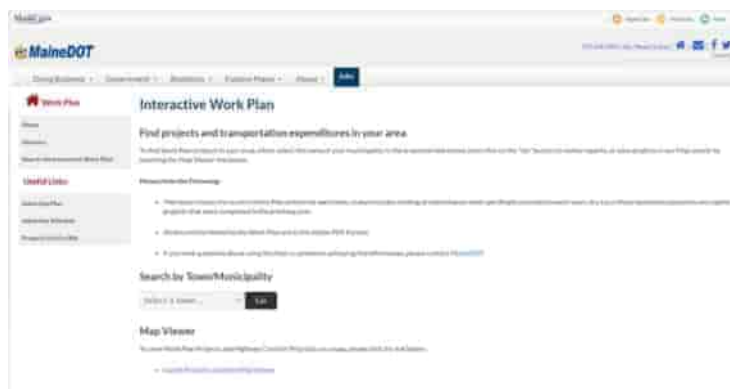
- Coordination of public involvement activities and public hearings.

- Early and continuing opportunities for the public to be involved in the identification of social, economic, and environmental impacts as well as impacts associated with relocation of individuals, groups, or institutions.
- One or more public hearings or the opportunity for hearing(s) for any federal-aid project that:
  - Requires significant amounts of property acquisition.
  - Substantially changes the layout or functions of connecting roadways or of the facility being improved.
  - Has a substantial adverse impact on abutting property.
  - Has a significant social, economic, environmental or other effect.
  - The federal agency has determined should have a public hearing because it is in the public interest.

MaineDOT conscientiously observes the NEPA-related FHWA requirements for planning processes, studies, development of road and bridge improvement projects.

### 5.5 Enhanced Project Scoping

Enhanced Project Scoping (EPS) is a coordinated process for engaging stakeholders regarding a specific transportation matter. The EPS process is used on a limited number of projects each year to help decide the best course of action when the project is complex or controversial. Through the EPS process, the department strives to clearly define a project's purpose and need, assess alternatives to achieve the stated purpose and need, and ultimately to develop a clear scope of work for candidate projects for the Work Plan. EPS is often initiated as a result of customer concerns about potential project impacts to residents, businesses, and travelers. The public process for EPS is unique to the characteristics of each project. Scoping efforts can range from a 15-minute presentation at a select board meeting to utilization of websites, advisory committees, design charrettes, and multiple project-specific meetings. Since EPS efforts are primarily stakeholder partnerships, MaineDOT often defers to the host municipalities regarding the specific public involvement processes that will work best for them. These



communities typically sponsor the public processes, meetings, and other activities, and EPS staff are invited as participants.

### **5.6 MaineDOT Work Plan**

MaineDOT's annual Work Plan is developed each year to describe all projects and work activities planned by the department for a three-year period. On an ongoing basis, input from public officials, members of transportation stakeholder organizations, and the general public are incorporated in development of the Work Plan. MaineDOT continuously receives requests and comments from municipal officials, lawmakers, transportation stakeholders, and the public in the form of letters, emails, phone calls, and petitions. These requests and comments are evaluated by appropriate MaineDOT staff and considered in the development of the Work Plan. MaineDOT publishes the Work Plan on the MaineDOT website and accepts comments and questions about the plan on a continuing basis.

The public can also influence the Work Plan through participation in development of the department's long-range plan – the LRTP. During development of the LRTP, regional meetings are held across the state to obtain public and municipal input on potential candidate projects. Members of the public can provide input on the Work Plan process through other periodic regional meetings conducted by the Outreach Office. These regional meetings are held with service center communities and stakeholders by MaineDOT regional planning staff to discuss proposed transportation projects, major development proposals, studies, and department initiatives.

### **5.7 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)**

The [Statewide Transportation Improvement Program \(STIP\)](#) is a federally required document that lists federally funded transportation projects for a four-year time period. All projects funded by either the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) or Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must be listed in an approved STIP before they can be eligible for federal funding. The STIP demonstrates fiscal constraint and compliance with the Clean Air Act. The STIP provides an additional opportunity for public input for all projects included in the department's Work Plan. MaineDOT solicits public input specific to the STIP by making a draft document available for public comment for a period of 10 calendar days. Notice of the draft STIP is posted on the MaineDOT website.

Changes in project schedules, funding needs, priorities, and project scopes invariably occur as projects proceed. These changes require revising the approved STIP. Administrative modifications are not significant changes to the existing STIP, and therefore, no public involvement is required for those modifications. Amendments to the STIP are required for major changes, and for those amendments, a public involvement process is required. The STIP amendment process must provide a "reasonable opportunity" for public comment. This may include public meetings, public hearings, Public Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings, and municipal meetings. STIP amendments are posted on MaineDOT's website and the comment period is open for 10 calendar days. Once the public involvement period ends, MaineDOT will respond to

or address all substantive comments received. When the STIP change affects a project in an MPO area, the respective MPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) must be amended in conjunction with the STIP. MaineDOT may revise the STIP concurrently with the MPO revision and public involvement processes.

Beginning in 2016, MaineDOT transitioned to an annually developed and published STIP.

## **6.0 Public Involvement during Project Development**

### **6.1 Elements of Public Involvement in Project Development**

MaineDOT's Bureau of Project Development is charged with the timely and efficient delivery of MaineDOT's capital program, including projects selected by MPOs. The bureau is committed to achieving trust through on-time project delivery and promoting economic prosperity by infusing transportation resources into the economy as quickly as possible. Major activities include:

- Managing the development of the department's capital program from the approval of funding to public meetings and outreach to construction completion for all highway, bridge, and multimodal capital projects.
- Oversight of the contracting of construction projects, federal documentation, prequalification of contractors, and payment of contractors.
- Federally mandated materials testing, sampling, and analysis; independent quality-assurance testing; and reporting of incentive and disincentive payments.
- Engineering, boundary survey, and property acquisition in support of MaineDOT's capital program.
- Project-related wetland mitigation and surface water quality and management projects.

### **6.2 Public Involvement During Design Phase**

As a transportation improvement project moves from the planning phase into the design phase, ongoing public involvement is essential to maintain customer support for the project and to obtain meaningful input on the design elements. This public outreach is often a public meeting or series of public meetings, but it may also include less-formal dialogues with municipal officials, interested parties, and other stakeholders. The public involvement process may differ for each effort as projects vary in size, scope, and length of time required for design and construction. Design projects generally follow one of the public processes shown below. The project team determines the appropriate level based on the anticipated public interest from the scope and complexity of the project.

- Letter to the Municipality Only – For any project that has minimal impact on abutters and the traveling public, letters may be sent to the affected municipalities only. The letter content will include the project description, schedule, an explanation of expected impacts, and an offer of public process if the municipality requests it. If there will be minor impacts to abutters, property owners along the project may also receive letters. This type of public involvement is infrequent and typically only occurs for minor projects such as a paving project with no impacts beyond the existing pavement.
- Public Meetings – Any project where impacts to abutters or the traveling public are expected to be more than minor will involve one or more public meeting(s). The majority of MaineDOT projects involve at least one form of a public meeting. Many projects involve two public meetings and the opportunity for public engagement. With the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, MaineDOT instituted On-Demand Virtual Public Meetings as described in Section 4.1 of this document. Those On-Demand Virtual Meetings have proven to be more effective and allow greater public engagement than the previous in-person live meetings did. Also, these new meetings provide time and cost savings for both staff and the public by not requiring attendees to travel to a site and by giving members of the public the ability to learn and comment about the project at their convenience. MaineDOT will continue with the On-Demand Virtual Public Meetings even after the pandemic while including the option for having a Live Virtual Meeting or even including an In-Person Meeting in certain circumstances. The criteria for those inclusions will be developed in the near future.

### 6.3 Public Meeting Process

The graphic below depicts a typical process and timeline for a project from the Infrastructure Problem (Identified Need through Construction Completion). The first three phases (Infrastructure Problem, Planning Studies, and Projects Funded in Three-Year Work Plan) of this graphic take place outside of and before the project being delivered to the Bureau of Project Development.

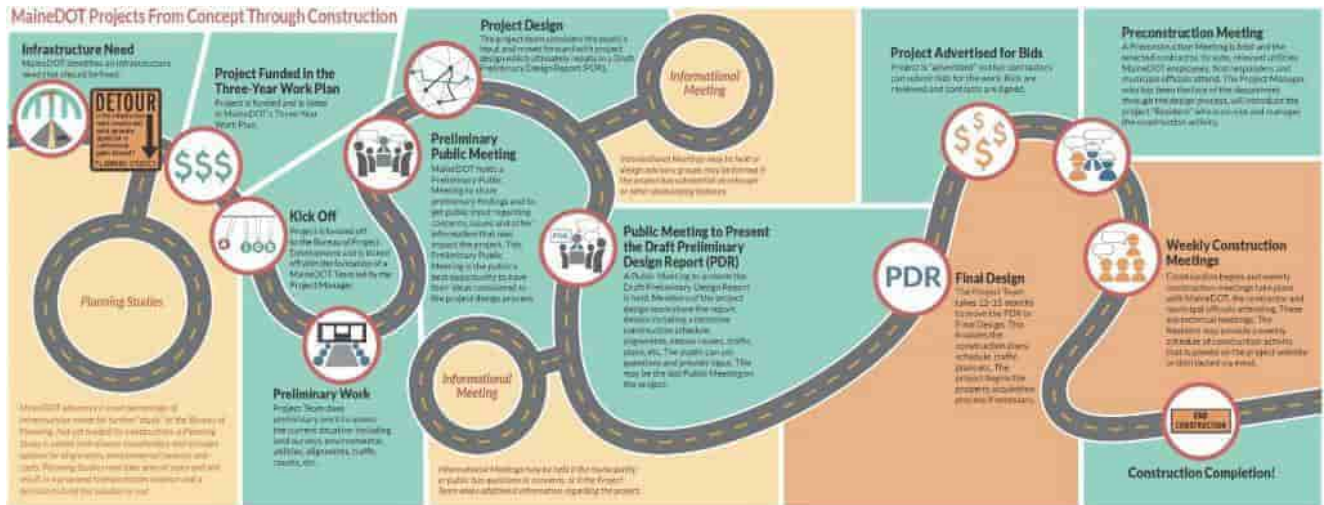
- Kick-Off – This stage is when a project that is funded in the Work Plan is handed off to the Bureau of Project Development to begin preparing the project team.
- Preliminary Work - During this initiation of preliminary design, where the team begins gathering information regarding the project and location, the project manager or appropriate team members reaches out to municipalities, utilities, MPOs, or other stakeholders to obtain initial feedback on the proposed project. For more complex projects, this may include a Preliminary Public Meeting. At this meeting, information such as project purpose and need, existing conditions, traffic data, accident data, funding and budget, and a tentative schedule are shared with

the public. Potential design solutions may also be discussed. These meetings are intended to provide balanced, objective information on the project and obtain feedback on challenges, needs, opportunities, and solutions. The project manager, designer, and other team members as deemed appropriate contribute and provide information for the meeting. See section 4.1 for additional information on the typical meeting format for this and other public meetings. In some cases, this meeting may determine whether additional public/informational meetings are necessary.

- Project Design – Using the obtained public input along with engineering judgement, the team begins the process of designing the project to meet the purpose and need of the project to address the infrastructure need adequately.
- Informational Meeting – If the project is identified as having a “substantial public interest,” an informational meeting may be necessary to update the public on the project’s progress. This could also include forming a Design Advisory Group and holding meetings with that group. Based on the type, complexity, or public interest, an Informational Meeting may be held at any point throughout the design process.
- Public Meeting to Present the Preliminary Design Report – This is also known as the Formal Public Meeting. At this meeting, the project details, as shown in the Preliminary Design Report (PDR), are presented to the public by the project manager and other team members as appropriate. The purpose of this meeting is to share the design and receive buy-in from the public regarding the preferred alternative/design. This should include the reason and factors influencing the chosen design. This meeting is typically the final opportunity for public input into the scope of the project, the chosen alternative, and significant design features.

MaineDOT incorporates input from public meetings in its design decisions. By involving the public early in the planning process and throughout the development and implementation of projects, MaineDOT provides its customers with the opportunity for coordination and participation before the approval of final designs. When appropriate, traffic control, construction staging and timing, and proposed detours may be discussed at public meetings during the design phase.





## 7.0 Public Involvement for Other Transportation Modes

### 7.1 Aviation

MaineDOT is assigned the responsibility and authority under M.R.S. Title 6 to promote public safety and the interests of aviation in the state. The department partners with municipalities, counties, and airport authorities to support their airport needs and ensure compliance with federal requirements. MaineDOT provides input on and usually matches funding for federally funded airport projects, including programming, scoping, environmental issues, property acquisition, design, and construction and is involved with planning for the General Aviation (GA) airports. Specifically, MaineDOT works closely with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to program capital projects under the Airport Improvement Program and Military Airport Program for airports in the National Plan of Integrated Airports Systems. This process includes an annual consultation with airport sponsors, their consultant, and FAA staff to discuss, prioritize, and schedule projects for funding, resulting in a multi-year statewide aviation capital improvement plan.

At the state level, the department receives regular input from the Maine Aeronautical Advisory Board (MAAB), which typically meets three times per year to advise the department on any and all aviation matters. The Board is composed of a broad cross section of aviation stakeholders who contribute informed recommendations to the department. These meetings offer an opportunity to discuss pertinent issues and are well-attended by aviation stakeholders, who are kept informed of aviation news by MaineDOT staff through an extensive aviation stakeholder email distribution list. Virtual participation is always made available, and a public comment period is scheduled at each regular meeting.

Every 10 to 15 years, the state updates its Statewide Aviation System Plan, which affords an opportunity to conduct robust stakeholder input on the needs of the aviation system. Surveys, interviews, and stakeholder meetings are utilized to garner public input from various user groups and host communities. A Project Advisory Committee composed of diverse aviation stakeholders is recruited to guide the effort and facilitate public and private sector outreach. The aviation stakeholder distribution list, as well as

the MaineDOT website and social media channels, are used to keep the public informed as the plan is developed.

Locally, Airport Master Plans are developed for short-, mid-, and long-term development goals (5, 10, and 20 years respectively) and include a detailed description of scheduled planning and construction projects. These plans are updated every five to ten years. Planning for airports and all facilities using FAA funding includes an opportunity for public meetings to consider economic, social, and environmental effects and consistency with goals and objectives of the surrounding communities. The public is notified of such meetings through a published public notice.

## **7.2 Bicycle and Pedestrian**

MaineDOT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Program supports the development and improvement of bicycle and pedestrian facilities throughout Maine by managing a competitive grant program that utilizes federal funding made available through Surface Transportation Set-Aside Funding. This program also collaborates with MaineDOT's Safety Office to program bicycle and pedestrian projects that improve safety. MaineDOT partners with municipalities throughout Maine to identify, fund, and construct bicycle and pedestrian projects designed to improve safety at the local level; improve multimodal access to employment, education, and recreational opportunities; and improve an area's sense of community. MaineDOT also works closely with numerous state agencies, advocacy organizations, federal transportation programs, and regional planning organizations to raise awareness of bicycle and pedestrian safety issues; the importance of well-maintained and accessible infrastructure; and advocate for active, sustainable transportation. Beginning in 2017, MaineDOT partnered with several public and private groups to create a nationally renowned pedestrian safety project centered on public engagement and grassroots efforts in communities with high pedestrian crash rates. Throughout its programming, MaineDOT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Program facilitates outreach and education sessions with the primary purpose of raising public awareness, engaging communities in discussions around infrastructure and safety, and providing educational sessions to empower local citizens to become more active in their communities and engage in active transportation pursuits.

## **7.3 Ferry Service**

Under M.R.S. Title 23, Chapter 412. WATERBORNE TRANSPORTATION, The Maine State Ferry Service (MSFS), an entity within the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT), is statutorily charged with providing vehicle, freight, and passenger ferry service to the islands of North Haven, Vinalhaven, Islesboro, Matinicus, Swan's Island, and Frenchboro.

MaineDOT is required to collect at least 50 percent of the cost to operate the MSFS through fares and user fees. The remaining costs are paid out of the Highway Fund budget. In addition to contributing half of the operating costs of the ferry service, MaineDOT also funds all capital investments for the Maine State Ferry Service, such as new ferry vessels and improvements to shoreside infrastructure. MaineDOT holds Maine State Ferry Service Advisory Board (FSAB) meetings with representatives of the island municipalities on a bi-monthly basis to plan and prioritize island needs and projects as

well as periodic public meetings in the establishment of rates and capital projects. The public is notified of these meetings through a public notice. As provided in 23 M.R.S.A. § 4301, the Maine State Ferry Advisory Board is established within the Maine Department of Transportation.

#### **7.4 Freight and Freight Rail**

MaineDOT developed the Integrated Freight Plan (IFP) in 1998, updated it in both 2001 and 2008, and developed a successor document – the Integrated Freight Strategy (IFS) – in 2011. Together, these plans help shape statewide freight policy and investment activities, strengthen the relationship with the private sector freight community, and allow MaineDOT to be more responsive to both public and private sector freight needs and issues. When State Freight Plans became a requirement of FHWA, MaineDOT developed its most recent IFS, which was submitted and approved by FHWA in December 2017. These efforts are reviewed and updated in order to accurately encompass recent trends and activities. Public involvement during IFS development includes extensive consultation with various stakeholders in Maine’s freight transportation system—transportation companies, manufacturers and other shippers, and owners of transportation facilities. The general public is afforded the opportunity to comment on the department’s freight plans through plan postings on the MaineDOT website.

Statewide rail planning is required by federal law under guidelines established originally by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and more recently by the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 and the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008. These laws require that rail capital projects be identified in a State Rail Plan in order to be eligible for federal financial assistance.

Federal guidance for the State Rail Plan includes:

- Increasing the safety and security of the transportation system.
- Increasing mobility of people and freight.
- Protecting and enhancing the environment, promoting energy conservation, improving quality of life, and promoting consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns.
- Enhancing the integration and connectivity of the transportation system for people and freight across and between modes throughout the state.
- Promoting efficient system management and operation.
- Emphasizing the preservation of the existing transportation system.

Maine’s state rail goals and objectives are included in Maine’s Long-Range Transportation Plan 2050 (LRTP). Public involvement during development of the State Rail Plan includes public meetings to help shape the direction of the plan and incorporate public comments and suggestions as well as posting of the plan on the MaineDOT website. The Federal Railroad Administration reviews and approves the plan.

#### **7.5 Passenger Rail**

Passenger rail planning and outreach are part of the statewide rail plan (see section 7.4). Additional passenger rail planning project outreach is done through public meetings, MaineDOT website project pages, and through presentations to regional planning organizations.

## **7.6 Ports and Marine**

MaineDOT has followed its “Three Port Strategy” since the late 1970s. This has allowed planning and investment to remain focused on the three, deep-water, industrial seaports of Portland, Searsport, and Eastport. The emphasis on investment at Maine’s three ports has been important in developing maritime-related business opportunities in the state. While waterborne freight transportation makes up a relatively low percentage of the overall freight movement throughout the state, Maine’s focus on its three ports has resulted in three modern and adequately equipped ports with the capability to handle a diverse array of cargo. Ports and Marine is included in the Maine Integrated Freight Strategy (MIFS) and gives members of the public and maritime stakeholders the opportunity for comment throughout its development. The Maine Port Authority also holds regular public meetings and provides members of the public the ability to discuss marine-related activity with state officials.

Smaller ports are numerous along the Maine coastline. Fishing and lobstering are significant economic drivers for many of these coastal communities. MaineDOT has provided the Small Harbor Improvement Program (SHIP) for these communities to access state transportation funds for marine infrastructure improvement. The program is very popular and has a high demand, and through planning and prioritization by need, most projects can be funded within three years of application.

Also prevalent in Maine are members of the transient boating population who enjoy thousands of miles of coastline. Many marina owners are capitalizing on the increased demand for transient boating slips by taking advantage of the Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In partnership with MaineDOT, the BIG program accepts applications for funding up to \$1.5 million to provide facilities for transient boaters with vessels 26 feet or greater in length.

## **7.7 Transit**

MaineDOT is constantly informed by its close connections with public transit providers and Metropolitan Planning Organizations across the state in understanding and prioritizing needs. The department is further guided by the Public Transit Advisory Council (PTAC), an appointed board of diverse stakeholders with knowledge of transit needs from a variety of user groups, partnering organizations, and providers. The Council meets two or three times each year and is required to submit a biennial report to the Governor and Legislature in each odd-numbered year, outlining needs and making recommendations regarding public transportation.

Every five years, both state law and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulation require the creation of Locally Coordinated Plans to document regional needs (particularly relating to older Mainers, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals), evaluate capacity, and facilitate collaboration. MaineDOT, with the support

of all transit providers using state or federal funds, takes responsibility for developing a statewide Locally Coordinated Plan covering all regions and providers. Locally Coordinated Plans involve contacting a broad range of potential stakeholders and interested parties and holding forums in accessible locations to obtain public input on how best to provide transit services that meet the needs of transit-dependent populations. Notifications for these forums include information that translation services are available upon request. The current Locally Coordinated Plan (2019-2023) includes an ambitious list of recommendations guiding department efforts that were prioritized by the Public Transit Advisory Council and are consistent with the recommendations made in the Council's 2019 biennial report. Public forums were cosponsored by age-friendly communities, social service agencies, and transit providers.

MaineDOT provides financial support as part of its Rural Transit (FTA Section 5311) Program to intercity providers, which are typically private, for-profit businesses. To inform this program, a consultation with private sector providers is held to understand the private sector perspective and ensure an equal opportunity to apply for program support. The State Management Plan describes MaineDOT's policies and procedures for the administration of the public transportation programs funded by the FTA. This plan is updated periodically and is a requirement of FTA, which provides financial assistance to states – through a number of programs – to develop new transit systems and improve, maintain, and operate existing systems. FTA requires that each state describe the state's policies and procedures for the state-managed portion of these programs. Public involvement for the State Management Plan includes consultation with a broad range of potential stakeholders and interested parties and holding transit forums in accessible locations to obtain public input on how best to provide transit services to meet the needs of transit-dependent populations. Advanced notice and information about these forums are made available on the MaineDOT website.

In 2015, MaineDOT completed a Statewide Strategic Transit Plan – a 10-year comprehensive transit plan intended to assist MaineDOT in prioritizing service improvements, identifying performance measures, and establishing standards for transit services. The plan provides a holistic approach to evaluating surface passenger transportation initiatives, programs, and funding sources. This includes interagency coordination of public and social service transportation, operations plans for transit districts and park and ride lots, plans for connectivity with passenger rail and ferry service, and capital improvements for transit providers. The plan has a focus on Maine's aging population with an assessment of and recommendations for meeting elderly transportation needs statewide. In addition, the plan makes recommendations on best practices for transit planning and funding strategies. During 2013 and 2014, public involvement in development of this plan included involvement used for Statewide Strategic Transit Plan updates. The 2019-2023 Locally Coordinated Plan refreshed and sharpened the focus on recommendations within the Strategic Statewide Transit Plan. The recommendations of both plans guide department efforts and are kept in front of the Public Transit Advisory Council, whose meetings are open to the public with a time for public comment structured into the agenda.

## **8.0 Public Involvement for Maintenance Activities**

### **8.1 Maintenance and Operations Public Involvement**

The Bureau of Maintenance and Operations (M&O) uses different public involvement methods than other MaineDOT bureaus use. The need to address a pothole, wash bridges, stripe centerlines, plow the roads, replace a rotted culvert, cut trees that have fallen into the road after a storm, clean out ditches, fix clogged drainage, etc. requires more immediate response. Most of these items and situations are noted in M&O's 511-page plan.

Depending on the activity, M&O use door knockers (informational cards placed on front door handles) to advise when MaineDOT will be in the area to perform certain work. If M&O is performing vegetation management along a corridor, we will place these door knockers to advise that any trees we cut within the Right-of-Way (ROW) are the property of the landowner who can call to request that the wood be left for him or her.

If MaineDOT is ditching along a roadway, door knockers are distributed to advise of the coming effort. Many property owners want the fill from ditching, and this gives them an opportunity to fill out forms to request this material. In general, a door knocker is used when we will be working for an extended period along a corridor. Larger vegetation management like cutting trees on the interstate does involve us contacting abutters to advise that the work will be performed. In this case the landowners do not own the wood, but many don't want to lose the screening effect vegetation provides. Business owners tend to want more clearing than the department is prepared to do because they want visibility for their business. This scenario requires M&O to find a balance between competing public demands in its work.

## **9.0 Public Involvement and Partner Agencies**

### **9.1 Tribal Governments**

In order to maintain improved relationships with Tribal Governments in the state of Maine, MaineDOT established a department-wide Tribal Communication Policy. The policy provides guidance to MaineDOT personnel when working with Tribal Governments in Maine regarding transportation-related issues.

MaineDOT coordinates with the Tribal Governments on all projects, studies, and other activities that may impact the Tribal Governments, Tribal Lands, or properties of traditional religious or cultural significance. The MaineDOT Tribal Liaison in the Bureau of Planning is the primary point of contact for tribal-related transportation matters. Project managers must also take an active role in contacting the Tribal Governments to ensure they are kept informed and involved.

## 9.2 Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are established in federal law and subject to state DOT oversight. They do the same transportation planning work, including the prioritization and funding of transportation projects, for the urbanized portions of federally defined metropolitan areas as MaineDOT does for the rest of the state. Every two years, these MPOs receive an allocation of funds from MaineDOT for planning. Annually, they receive a capital improvement allocation to construct federally eligible projects.

MPOs must engage in a metropolitan planning process that creates opportunities for public involvement, participation, and consultation throughout the development of their long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Under this requirement, MPOs must allow for:

- Adequate public notice of public participation activities.
- Review and comment at key decision points in the development of the MTP and TIP.
- Multiple, accessible participation formats, including electronic and in-person.

The MPO should develop a collaborative and comprehensive Public Participation Plan with the public and stakeholder communities to be used in the development of the MTP and TIP as well as to frame the strategies for public and stakeholder communication and collaboration in all phases of the planning process. The Participation Plan itself must be prepared by the MPO with a 45-day public review and comment period. Specific details and requirements can be found [here](#) in 23 CFR 450.316.

## 9.3 Regional Planning Organizations

Regional Planning Organizations were established by Maine State Statute (i.e. Planning Commissions, Councils of Governments) and receive funds from the Maine Legislature and Maine Coastal Program to provide general planning assistance to municipalities within their respective regions. The organizations are private nonprofits that work in coordination and collaboratively with MaineDOT and other state agencies per contract assignment letters. Those contracts include tasks and activities that support MaineDOT's staff and regional offices with municipal outreach, safety planning, tribal liaison work, bicycle and pedestrian planning, transit planning, ADA data collection, comprehensive plan assistance, traffic data collection, traffic management collection, and public works.

Funding allocations will be mutually agreed upon based upon amount of work capacity anticipated for each selected task annually with contracts beginning on the first day of the new calendar year. This assistance is available upon request to the extent that the funding allows. At a minimum, this assistance will include answering general questions, advising on committee formation, explaining the Growth Management Act and the

Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule, and providing presentations on interlocal resource planning.

## **10.0 Periodic Review of Public Involvement Plan**

The Public Involvement Plan (PIP) document will be reviewed on an annual basis. In the instance of changes to federal and/or state regulations, the department will review in a timely manner and update accordingly.



### I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is to provide guidance to Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) Environmental Office staff and Project Managers engaged in development of transportation projects funded or approved by the Federal Highway Administration's Maine Division Office (FHWA). The intent of this PIP is to outline the process for carrying out public involvement in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), its associated implementing regulations, and other federal environmental laws and regulations. These procedures describe coordination of public involvement activities, including meetings and public hearings. Also, these procedures seek to ensure early and continuing opportunities during project development for the public to be involved in the identification of social, economic, and environmental (SEE) impacts, as well as impacts associated with relocation of individuals, groups, or institutions. This PIP pertains to NEPA actions classified as Categorical Exclusions (CE), Environmental Assessments (EA), and Environmental Impact Statements (EIS). Additionally, this PIP fulfills the requirements of 23 CFR 771.111(h), ensuring that States have procedures approved by FHWA to carry out public involvement. The *MaineDOT Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-making Plan* should be used for all other purposes not stated in this PIP.

During the development of this PIP, FHWA and MaineDOT reviewed MaineDOT's three-year workplan, the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and Long-Range Transportation Plans. Based on the projects proposed and anticipated in the future, coupled with the historical decline in the number of Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) projects in Maine, FHWA and MaineDOT have prepared this PIP to focus on project actions processed with a CE. EISs, as defined in 23 CFR 771.115(a), are actions that significantly affect the environment. EAs, as defined in 23 CFR 771.115(c), are actions in which the significance of the environmental impact is not clearly established. If a project may result in significant environmental impacts and an EA or EIS is prepared, early consultation between FHWA and MaineDOT is required. FHWA and MaineDOT may develop a project-specific PIP as appropriate to ensure compliance with NEPA, its associated implementing regulations, 23 CFR 771.111(h), and other federal environmental laws and regulations. Public involvement requirements for EISs and EAs are briefly described within this document.

### II. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT METHODS

The project team will determine the appropriate format and techniques to involve the public based on the type of project and its potential for SEE impacts. Table 1 summarizes what level of public involvement is generally appropriate. The types of public involvement tools are described further below.

#### A. Notification

The publication of the STIP and MaineDOT's three-year workplan provide an initial opportunity during the planning process for the public to comment on federally funded projects (for more information, see the *MaineDOT Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making Plan*).

For any project that is expected to have minimal impact on abutters, the traveling public, and the environment, letters will be sent to municipalities. This type of public involvement typically only occurs for minor projects such as a paving project with no impacts beyond the existing pavement. The letter content will include the project description, schedule, an explanation of expected impacts, and an offer of a public meeting, if it is requested by the municipality. If there will be minor impacts to abutters, property owners along the project will also receive a letter.

#### B. Virtual Public Involvement (VPI)

Virtual Public Involvement includes but is not limited to live virtual meetings, on demand virtual meetings, and web-based platforms for information sharing and public comments. Initially developed to supplement notification and in-person forums, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated adoption of virtual practices and has become an essential part of MaineDOT Public Involvement. Additional information on Virtual Public Involvement is provided in the *MaineDOT Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-making*

## MaineDOT NEPA Public Involvement Plan

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Plan. MaineDOT will continue to incorporate virtual tools and methods to enhance public involvement as they become available.

### **Virtual Meetings**

On-Demand virtual meetings consist of recorded videos of the types of presentations that would typically be given at an in-person meeting to provide project information and request public input, comments, and local information. The videos and any supporting information to help the public understand the project are loaded onto the MaineDOT website. Standard public meetings are used to disseminate information, provide a setting for public discussion, and get feedback from the community.

In accordance with 23 CFR 771.111(h)(2)(iv), MaineDOT provides the public with reasonable notice of virtual meetings. Notification occurs at least two weeks prior to the date of the meeting. A public notice is published in the official local newspaper(s) where the proposed project is located. Appendix A shows an example public notice format that is typically used for MaineDOT projects. Other notification methods may also be used, such as publication on MaineDOT's web site, direct mailings to adjacent landowners and Tribal officials with interest, municipal notification forums, social media, etc.

The public notices for each project direct people to the MaineDOT Virtual Public Involvement website. The Virtual Public Involvement site has a video explaining the process and lists all projects with an active Virtual Public Meeting. For each project, it lists the timeframe, typically two weeks, that it is accepting comments. After that comment period, the project information can still be viewed at the Public Meeting Library page. <https://www.maine.gov/mdot/vpi/library/>

It is important to solicit comments from and accommodate people who may not have internet or mobile access. MaineDOT will request that public meeting notices provided to municipalities be posted at municipal buildings and/or public libraries whenever possible. Notification of virtual public involvement opportunities includes all contact information (mail, email, and phone number) of the Project Manager. This allows those without internet and mobile access to contact the project manager via multiple methods to learn about the project. The Project Manager can provide additional contact information for Environmental Office staff who can address environmental and NEPA-related comments, concerns, or questions.

### **Virtual Information sharing and comment solicitation**

MaineDOT is exploring and using other technologies and web-based platforms for information sharing and public comment. These are described further in the *MaineDOT Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-making* and are used to complement virtual meetings as needed.

## C. In-person Public Involvement

**Public Meetings** have historically been the most common public meeting format type used in Maine. Standard public meetings are used to disseminate information, provide a setting for public discussion, and get feedback from the community. Standard public meetings provide an opportunity for agencies and the public to interact, in addition to allowing MaineDOT and FHWA to gather community comments, local knowledge and information for incorporation into the public record. The need to have a court reporter present should be considered.

**Open Houses and Forums** provide an informal setting in which people receive information about a plan or a project. Unlike a standard public meeting, there are no formal discussions or presentations. Instead, the community receives information through a variety of media, including written products, exhibits, and open dialogue with attendees. All attendees are encouraged to give opinions, comments, and preferences to

staff. Comments are obtained verbally or in writing, are included in the project record, and should be made available to the public. The need to have a court reporter present should be considered.

***Other***

Collecting public input can occur in a variety of ways and largely varies on the scope of the project and proposed impacts. The public meeting formats can be combined when circumstances fit; a standard public meeting with a presentation can be combined with other engagement formats, such as workshops, or design charettes. In some cases, MaineDOT will engage community advisory committees or stakeholder groups that inform and participate in decision making on project details during specific design phases. The key is to determine what type of engagement is best for the project and the audience, and to ensure feedback is received.

***Notice of In-person Public Involvement Opportunities***

In accordance with 23 CFR 771.111(h)(2)(iv), MaineDOT provides the public with reasonable notice of in-person meetings. Notification occurs at least two weeks prior to the date of the meeting. A public notice is published in the official local newspaper(s) where the proposed project is located. Appendix A shows an example public notice format that is typically used for MaineDOT projects. Other notification methods may also be used, such as publication on MaineDOT's web site, direct mailings to adjacent landowners and Tribal officials with interest, municipal notification forums, social media, etc.

It is important to solicit comments from and accommodate people who may not have internet or mobile access. MaineDOT will request that public meeting notices provided to municipalities be posted at municipal buildings and/or public libraries whenever possible. Notification of public involvement opportunities includes all contact information (mail, email, and phone number) of the Project Manager. This allows those without internet and mobile access to contact the project manager via multiple methods to learn about the project if they are unable to attend the in-person meeting and/or address accessibility concerns prior to the meeting. The Project Manager can provide additional contact information for Environmental Office staff who can address environmental and NEPA-related comments, concerns, or questions.

In accordance with 23 CFR 771.111(h)(2)(iii), MaineDOT will work to ensure the meeting is held at a convenient time and place. In-person meetings should take place close to the project (within the municipality) and be held in the early evening (e.g. 6:00 – 8:00 pm). The Project Manager is named in the notification and it contains information to contact the Project Manager. Project Managers coordinate with MaineDOT's Environmental Office for talking points concerning NEPA and SEE impacts prior to the meeting.

D. In-Person Public Hearings

In-person Formal public hearings are held for any project which requires substantial amounts of right of way, substantially changes the layout or functions of connecting roadways or of the facility being improved, has a substantial adverse impact on abutting property, otherwise has a major SEE or other effect, for which FHWA determines that a public hearing is in the public interest. When completing an EIS, procedures in 23 U.S.C. 128 must be followed for NEPA required public hearings.

Per 23 CFR § 771.111(h) public hearings require explanation of the following information, as appropriate:

- The project's purpose, need, and consistency with the goals and objectives of any local or regional planning documents,
- The project's alternatives, and major design features,
- The SEE and other impacts of the project,



## MaineDOT NEPA Public Involvement Plan

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- The relocation assistance program and the right of way acquisition process, and
- The procedures for receiving both oral and written comments from the public.

Public hearings should also provide:

- An opportunity for public involvement in defining the purpose and need and the range of alternatives, for any action subject to the project development procedures in [23 U.S.C. 139](#); and
- Public notice and an opportunity for public review and comment on a Section 4(f) *de minimis* impact finding, if applicable, in accordance with [23 CFR 774.5\(b\)\(2\)\(i\)](#).

Public hearings should always have a court reporter present, to record the meeting and publish a formal transcript to be included in the project record and made available to the public. MaineDOT will submit a transcript of each public hearing to FHWA and a certification that a required hearing or hearing opportunity was offered to the public. The transcript will be accompanied by copies of all written comments received at the public hearing or during an announced period after the public hearing.

### ***Notice of In-Person Public Hearings***

For all projects that have a public hearing or meeting, the public notice will be published in the official local newspaper(s) where the proposed project is located.

In accordance with 23 CFR 771.111(h)(2)(iv), MaineDOT provides the public with reasonable notice of in-person meetings. Notification occurs at least two weeks prior to the date of the meeting. A public notice is published in the official local newspaper(s) where the proposed project is located. Other notification methods may also be used, such as publication on MaineDOT's web site, direct mailings to adjacent landowners and Tribal officials with interest, municipal notification forums, social media, etc.

It is important to solicit comments from and accommodate people who may not have internet or mobile access. MaineDOT will request that public meeting notices provided to municipalities be posted at municipal buildings and/or public libraries whenever possible. Notification of public involvement opportunities includes all contact information (mail, email, and phone number) of the Project Manager. This allows those without internet and mobile access to contact the project manager via multiple methods to learn about the project if they are unable to attend the in-person meeting and/or address accessibility concerns. The Project Manager can provide additional contact information for Environmental Office staff who can address environmental and NEPA-related comments, concerns, or questions.

In accordance with 23 CFR 771.111(h)(2)(iii), MaineDOT will work to ensure the public hearing or meeting is held at a convenient time and place. Public hearings must take place close to the project (within the municipality) and will typically be held in the early evening (e.g. 6:00 – 8:00 pm). The Project Manager is named in the notification and there is a link to communicate with the Project Manager on the website. Project Managers coordinate with MaineDOT's Environmental Office for talking points concerning NEPA and SEE impacts prior to the public hearing or meeting.

MaineDOT NEPA Public Involvement Plan

Table 1. MaineDOT Public Involvement Guidelines

Level of Public Involvement	Typical NEPA Class of Action	Project Characteristics
<b>Notification</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Publication in STIP and MaineDOT Work Plan</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Written notice to Municipality/Abutters</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Categorical Exclusions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Minimal Impact on abutters, travelling public, and environment (e.g., paving/resurfacing projects)</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Public Involvement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>On-Demand Virtual Meeting</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Web-based Platforms</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Categorical Exclusions</li> <li>➤ Environmental Assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ More than minor/minimal Social, Economic, Environmental (SEE) Impacts</li> <li>➤ Municipal Request</li> </ul>
<b>In-Person Public Involvement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Public Meetings</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Open Houses &amp; Forums</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Other Formats (workshops, etc.)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Categorical Exclusions</li> <li>➤ Environmental Assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Public Concern/Controversy</li> <li>➤ Established and/or Varied Stakeholder Groups</li> <li>➤ Limited Broadband/Cellular Service in Project Area</li> <li>➤ Municipal or Legislative Requests</li> <li>➤ Minority population within the project defined area <math>\geq 5\%</math> or other environmental justice concerns (<i>Contact group/community leaders to discuss project and identify needs</i>)</li> <li>➤ Environmental Assessment required</li> </ul>
<b>Public Hearing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>In-Person Public Hearing</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Environmental Assessments</li> <li>➤ Environmental Impact Statements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Substantial Right of Way Impact</li> <li>➤ Substantial changes to the layout or functions of connecting roadways or of the facility being improved</li> <li>➤ Major Social Environmental, Economic or other impact</li> <li>➤ Substantial Adverse Impact on Abutting property</li> <li>➤ FHWA Determination that a public hearing is in the public interest</li> </ul>



### III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT- CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS

*The publication of the STIP and MaineDOT's three-year workplan provide an initial opportunity during the planning process for the public to comment on federally funded projects (for more information, see the MaineDOT Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making Plan).* At this stage the Environmental Office completes a preliminary and high-level screening of candidate projects for potential SEE impacts. Once the project has been incorporated in the final approved STIP and workplan, the project is officially "kicked off" by the MaineDOT Project Manager. The kick-off (or initiation) stage begins the initial review of potential SEE impacts of a project. The Environmental Office begins coordination with federal, state, local and tribal agencies and the public to identify resources within the area and potential project impacts to the environment and community. Examples include Section 106 notifications requesting information on historic resources, or information concerning the presence of threatened and endangered species for Section 7 compliance. A preliminary public meeting may occur approximately two months after the kick-off meeting. Information about the need for the project and the project site is gathered. Once a project has been preliminarily determined to be classified as a CE, the processes and procedures in this PIP must be followed.<sup>1</sup> CEs, as defined in 23 CFR 771.117(a), are actions which do not involve significant environmental impacts.

Public outreach is often in the form of public meetings or hearings, but it may also be addressed in less formal dialogues with municipal officials, interested parties and other stakeholders. The public involvement process may be different for each effort as projects vary in size, scope, complexity, and the length of time required for preliminary engineering, NEPA and final design. Table 1 summarizes the typical approach to public involvement based on project characteristics.

Virtual or in-person public meetings are completed for any project with impacts to abutters or the traveling public which are expected to be more than minor. A public meeting (virtual or in person) is used to inform the public of a proposed project, identify and resolve issues of concern as early as practicable, and invite public participation or engagement.

Typically, a for CE project with more than minor impacts MaineDOT conducts two public meetings: a preliminary public meeting and a final public meeting. The MaineDOT Project Manager is responsible for scheduling and coordinating all public meetings related to the project. The Environmental Office coordinates development of talking points concerning NEPA and environmental impacts with the Project Manager. At the preliminary public meeting, which is held typically within two months of the project kick-off, minimal design has occurred, and the content is focused on project purpose and need, information about the site, environmental resources, potential right of way needs, and public concerns and input. It is critical for the Project Manager to provide information to the Environmental Office subsequent to the public meeting concerning potential environmental impacts and input from the public on potential impacts. At the final public meeting, typically options/alternatives have been considered and a Preliminary Design Report has been completed that recommends an engineering design solution. Discussions focus on the preferred preliminary design and impacts. For complex projects, additional public meetings or public involvement may be completed depending upon potential impacts.

FHWA and MaineDOT are required to consider all comments received from the public. Public input can help to inform the decision on the project. While there are no specific requirements for FHWA and MaineDOT to respond to all comments for a CE-level project, a response should be provided to all substantive comments. A substantive comment is one which suggests the modifications of an alternative, suggests the development and evaluation of an alternative not previously considered, supplements, improves or modifies analyses, or corrects a factual error. FHWA has specific guidance on responses to comments on EAs and EISs, which is addressed later in this document.

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<sup>1</sup> An individual public involvement plan may be developed and established for an individual project separately from this public involvement plan, subject to FHWA review and approval.

**IV. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT-ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS**

Public involvement requirements for the development of an EA are described in 23 CFR 771.119.

For actions that require an Environmental Assessment (EA), MaineDOT, in consultation with FHWA will, at the earliest appropriate time, begin consultation with interested agencies and others to advise them of the scope of the project and to achieve the following objectives:

- ✓ determine which aspects of the proposed action have potential for SEE impacts;
- ✓ identify alternatives and measures which might mitigate adverse environmental impacts; and
- ✓ identify other environmental review and consultation requirements which should be performed concurrently with the EA.

MaineDOT will accomplish this through an early coordination process or through a scoping process. Public involvement will be summarized, and the results of agency coordination will be included in the EA.

The EA is subject to FHWA approval before it is made available to the public as an FHWA document.

The EA need not be circulated for comment, but the document must be made available for public inspection at MaineDOT and at FHWA. Notice of availability of the EA, briefly describing the action and its impacts, will be sent by MaineDOT to the affected units of government.

**EAs with a Public Hearing**

When a public hearing is held, the EA will be made available at the public hearing and for a minimum of 15 days in advance of the public hearing. The notice of the public hearing in local newspapers will announce the availability of the EA and where it may be obtained or reviewed. MaineDOT will post the EA on its website for public review and comment. Comments will be submitted in writing to MaineDOT or FHWA within 30 days of the availability of the EA unless MaineDOT and FHWA determine, for good cause, that a different period is warranted. Public hearing requirements are described above.

**EAs with no Public Hearing**

When a public hearing is not held, MaineDOT will place a notice in a newspaper(s) similar to a public hearing notice and at a similar stage of development of the action, advising the public of the availability of the EA and where information concerning the action may be obtained. MaineDOT will post the EA on its website for public review and comment. The notice will invite comments from all interested parties. Comments will be submitted in writing to MaineDOT or FHWA within 30 days of the publication of the notice unless MaineDOT and FHWA determines, for good cause, that a different period is warranted.

FHWA will review the EA and any public hearing comments and other comments received regarding the EA and will respond to all substantive comments in writing. If FHWA agrees with MaineDOT's recommendation to issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), it will publish a separate written FONSI incorporating by reference the EA and any other appropriate environmental documents.

After a FONSI has been made by FHWA, a notice of availability of the FONSI will be sent by MaineDOT to the affected units of Federal, State, and local government and the document will be available from MaineDOT and FHWA upon request by the public.

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### V. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT-ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS

Public involvement requirements for the development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are described in 23 CFR § 771.111(h), 771.123 through 771.125 and 40 C.F.R. § 1506.6, as amended and FHWA Technical Advisory T 6640.8A (October 30, 1987).

As soon as practicable after determining that a proposal requires an environmental impact statement, the lead agency shall publish a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement. MaineDOT and FHWA may complete preliminary scoping activities before publication of the NOI to ensure that the proposal is sufficiently developed to allow for meaningful public comment. The notice shall include, as appropriate:

- (1) The purpose and need for the proposed action;
- (2) A preliminary description of the proposed action and alternatives the environmental impact statement will consider;
- (3) A brief summary of expected impacts;
- (4) Anticipated permits and other authorizations;
- (5) A schedule for the decision-making process;
- (6) A description of the public scoping process, including any scoping meeting(s);
- (7) A request for identification of potential alternatives, information, and analyses relevant to the proposed action (see § 1502.17 of this chapter); and
- (8) Contact information for a person within the agency who can answer questions about the proposed action and the environmental impact statement.

After publication of a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS, MaineDOT and FHWA will continue the scoping process which may consider any planning work already accomplished, in accordance with 23 CFR 450.12 or 450.318. The scoping process will be used to identify issues to be addressed in the EIS.

A draft EIS will be circulated for comment by the applicant and posted to MaineDOT's website. The draft EIS will be made available to the public and transmitted to agencies for comment no later than the time the document is filed with the Environmental Protection Agency in accordance with 40 CFR 1506.9. The draft EIS will be transmitted to public officials, interest groups, and members of the public known to have an interest in the proposed action or the draft EIS; Federal, State and local government agencies expected to have jurisdiction or responsibility over, or interest or expertise in, the action; and States and Federal Land Management entities which may be significantly affected by the proposed action or any of the alternatives.

#### **EIS Formal Public Hearings**

A formal public hearing must be held for all EIS projects. FHWA procedures for formal public hearings are provided above in Section II.D. This section of the NEPA lays out additional requirements unique to EISs.

Whenever an EIS public hearing is held, the draft EIS will be available at the public hearing and for a minimum of 15 days in advance of the public hearing. The availability of the draft EIS will be mentioned, and public comments requested, in any public hearing notice and at any public hearing presentation. If a public hearing on an action proposed for FHWA funding is not held, a notice will be placed in a newspaper similar to a public hearing notice



## MaineDOT NEPA Public Involvement Plan

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advising where the draft EIS is available for review, how copies may be obtained, and where comments should be sent. MaineDOT will post the Draft EIS on its website.

After circulation or publication of a draft EIS and consideration of comments received, a final EIS will be prepared by the lead agencies.

- ✓ The final EIS will identify the preferred alternative and evaluate all reasonable alternatives considered. It will also discuss substantive comments received on the draft EIS and responses thereto, summarize public involvement, and describe the mitigation measures that are to be incorporated into the proposed action.
- ✓ The final EIS will be transmitted to any persons, organizations, or agencies that made substantive comments on the draft EIS or requested a copy, no later than the time the document is filed with the Environmental Protection Agency.
- ✓ The applicant will also publish a notice of availability in local newspapers and publish the final EIS on Maine DOT's website.
- ✓ When filed with the Environmental Protection Agency, make the Final EIS available for public review at the applicant's offices and at the FHWA Maine Division Office. A copy should also be made available for public review at institutions such as local government offices, libraries, and schools, as appropriate.

When the final EIS is not combined with the Record of Decision (ROD), the FHWA will complete and sign a ROD no sooner than 30 days after publication of the final EIS notice in the Federal Register or 90 days after publication of a notice for the draft EIS, whichever is later. The ROD will present the basis for the decision, summarize any mitigation measures that will be incorporated in the project, and document any required Section 4(f) approval. All substantive comments received on the final EIS should be identified and given appropriate responses. Other comments should be summarized, and responses provided where appropriate. To minimize hardcopy requests and printing costs, the FHWA encourages the use of project websites or other publicly accessible electronic means to make the ROD available.

### **VI. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT REQUIREMENTS OF SPECIFIC FEDERAL LAWS & REGULATIONS**

Sections I. through VI. of this Public Involvement Plan discuss general approaches to public involvement based on project characteristics and NEPA Class of Action. This section addresses the public involvement requirements specific to federal environmental laws and regulations under the NEPA umbrella that apply to all NEPA Classes of Action. Understanding the potential environmental impacts associated with a proposed transportation project is critical, from a variety of different viewpoints. MaineDOT's Project Managers and Environmental Office staff work together to complete the public involvement process in accordance with the federal laws and regulations listed below.

#### **A. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act**

In accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations (36 CFR 800.2(d)), FHWA and MaineDOT are required to seek and consider the views of the public on a proposed undertaking and its effects on historic properties. To meet these requirements, MaineDOT's Environmental Office solicits early in the process for information about potential historic and archaeological properties. This solicitation occurs by sending letters to the municipality, tribes and Maine Historic Preservation Commission (Maine State Historic Preservation Officer or Maine SHPO). Specific public involvement procedures for Section 106 are regularly updated in MaineDOT's Section 106 Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).

Tribal Consultation procedures have been established through previous consultation efforts between FHWA, MaineDOT and each federally recognized tribe in Maine. Project specific consultation may be initiated by MaineDOT. The initial consultation will provide information which includes a map of the project area, a detailed description of the project, identifies project limits, and includes photographs of the project area, if available. FHWA will become involved in the consultation if there is a determination of adverse

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effect on historic properties to which a Tribe attaches religious or cultural significance or during government to government consultation.

Additionally, prior to the preliminary public meeting and final public meeting for a project, MaineDOT's Environmental Office will research and identify any historic resources within the project's Area of Potential Effect (APE). If there are historic resources present, MaineDOT's Environmental Office will coordinate with the Project Manager to ensure the historic resources are discussed and input regarding potential effects is received at the preliminary public meeting. In accordance with 36 CFR Part 800, it is required to receive public input on the eligibility of historic properties within the APE, effects on historic properties, and measures to minimize harm for adverse effects. Comments received from the public specific to historic properties will be provided to MaineDOT's Environmental Office for consideration during the Section 106 process. The Environmental Office also utilizes a public notice and posting information to the MaineDOT website at <https://www.maine.gov/mdot/env/comments/> for public review and comment on historic properties and effects.

On some projects, if Section 106 consulting parties are identified, Section 106 consulting parties' process is established. The Section 106 consulting parties' process can occur concurrently with the Section 106 public involvement process. However, the Section 106 consulting parties' process is separate from the Section 106 public involvement process.

B. Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act

In accordance with Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act and its implementing regulations (23 CFR 774.5(b)) and 23 CFR 771.111(h)(2)(viii) and FHWA Technical Advisory T 6640.8A *Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and Section 4(f) Documents*, MaineDOT's Environmental Office will provide for public notice and an opportunity for public review and comment on Section 4(f) de minimis impact findings specifically on publicly owned parks, recreational areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges.

MaineDOT's Environmental Office will identify Section 4(f) resources and associated de minimis use. MaineDOT's Environmental Office will coordinate with the Project Manager to ensure the de minimis use is discussed and input regarding potential effects is received at a public meeting. Or, input will be provided by a public notice and posting information to the MaineDOT website for public review and comment on the de minimis use.

C. 23 CFR 772 – Highway Traffic Noise and Construction Noise

Abatement of highway traffic noise and construction noise is also part of the environmental analysis for federally funded transportation projects. If a technical analysis determines a noise barrier is warranted to mitigate the noise associated with a project, a public meeting is required. Adjacent landowners and abutters to the project will be notified of the public meeting and invited to participate. MaineDOT's Project Manager, in cooperation with MaineDOT's Environmental Office and MaineDOT's Air Quality and Noise Specialist, will work together to determine appropriate public involvement activities and conduct public involvement in accordance with MaineDOT's most current Highway Traffic Noise Policy and this PIP.

D. Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice issues must be considered when planning any public involvement activity. Through MaineDOT's public process, comments and concerns regarding disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on low income and minority populations will be identified and addressed. If a population of low-income or minority populations is identified or comments are received on Environmental Justice issues, MaineDOT will ensure engagement of the population through public involvement procedures outlined in FHWA's *Guidance on Environmental Justice and NEPA* (2011).

MaineDOT shall implement the following procedures to the maximum extent practicable to ensure effective Outreach to Underserved People:

MaineDOT NEPA Public Involvement Plan

- Utilize tools such as EPA’s EJ Mapper and American Community Survey to identify populations in the project area;
- Ensure the participation of identified minority and low-income populations located within the limits of a proposed project by holding meetings that are close to or adjacent to the project areas;
- Provide good access for public participation by holding public forums and meetings at facilities that are ADA-accessible, at times that are convenient considering the work hours of the affected population, and offering translation services for non-English speaking populations upon request;
- Provide adequate notice of virtual or in person meetings that are accessible to low income populations/limited internet populations (e.g., providing meeting materials in a mobile-phone accessible format, and/or placing meeting notice at public libraries and schools); and
- Offer alternative methods of sharing information and obtaining feedback as suggested by community leaders and/or community members.

The NEPA document shall include in the appropriate section a discussion of major proactive efforts to ensure meaningful opportunities for public participation including activities to increase low-income and minority participation. Include in the document the views of the affected population(s) about the project and any proposed mitigation, and describe what steps are being taken to resolve any controversy that exists. Document the degree to which the affected groups of minorities and/or low-income populations have been involved in the decision-making process related to the alternative selection, impact analysis and mitigation.


Should changes to a project occur after all public involvement requirements have been met, FHWA and MaineDOT will determine whether the changes or new information warrant additional public involvement, based on the reevaluation of project environmental documents required by 23 CFR 771.111(h)(3).

**VII. RE-EVALUATIONS**

Based on the reevaluations of project environmental documents required by 771.129, the FHWA and MaineDOT will determine whether changes in the project or new information warrant additional public involvement. Re-evaluations generally do not require public involvement. However, public involvement may be required in situations where there are changes to the project or circumstances that involve other environmental review laws that have their own public involvement requirements (for example, Section 4(f) (23 U.S.C. 138/49 U.S.C. 303) requirements and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act). Although re-evaluations generally do not require public involvement, the Agency, in consultation with the project sponsor, may determine that some form of public involvement is appropriate.

**VIII. REVISIONS TO THIS PLAN**

MaineDOT or FHWA may request revision of the PIP at any time, as additional coordination efforts and processes are identified. If the PIP is revised, it must be made available for public comment.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Joyce N. Taylor, P.E.  
Chief Engineer  
Maine Department of Transportation

Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd D. Jorgensen  
Maine Division Administrator  
Federal Highway Administration

11/01/21

Date



**Appendix A- Example Public Notice Format**

**Notice of *Insert Preliminary or Formal***

**ON-DEMAND VIRTUAL  
PUBLIC MEETING  
*(Insert Town(s))***

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**To Discuss *(replace with project description here)***

**Access to this and all other Virtual Public Meetings  
are available at <http://mainedot.gov/vpi>  
This meeting gives the opportunity for public comment.**

MaineDOT will have an on-demand presentation available that will act as our *(Insert Prelim, Formal or Informational)* Public Meeting. This meeting will give information about the proposed project, including video presentations and other pertinent information to help the public understand the project. These on-demand meetings allow for increased engagement and convenient viewing at any time. The meeting also provides the ability for online comments and questions that will be answered by MaineDOT staff.

The Department is conducting the public meeting to inform the public and invite public comments. We are particularly interested in learning local views, discovering local resources, and identifying local concerns and issues. Anyone with interest is asked to view the presentation at the above website.

MaineDOT invites and encourages you to review the meeting and share your thoughts on this project until *(Insert the date comments close)*. While the official comment period closes on that date, the meeting will still be available for viewing beyond that date at our Project Library page located at this site. <https://www.maine.gov/mdot/vpi/library/>

Accommodations will be made for persons with disabilities. Translation services for non-English speakers will be provided upon request with reasonable advance notice.

Questions, comments, or inquiries can be made directly through the on-demand meeting or can be directed to the Project Manager listed below.

*(Add Name)*, Project Manager,  
Maine Department of Transportation,  
24 Child Street, 16 State House Station,  
Augusta, Maine 04333-0016.  
Telephone: (207) 624-xxxx.  
Email: *(Add email)*

**Work Identification Numbers 000000.00  
Federal Aid Project Number STP-000000**



**Notice of  
AN INFORMATIONAL  
PUBLIC MEETING  
IN BLUE HILL**

**TO DISCUSS  
THE BLUE HILL FALLS BRIDGE**

**Tuesday, AUGUST 8, 2017  
AT 6:30 P.M.  
IN THE AUDITORIUM  
OF THE BLUE HILL TOWN OFFICE  
LOCATED ON 18 UNION STREET**

Please join MaineDOT on Tuesday, August 8<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm for an informational public meeting to discuss the future of the Falls Bridge (#5038) which carries Route 175 over the Salt Pond in Blue Hill.

Representatives of the Maine Department of Transportation and local Bridge Advisory Committee are investigating rehabilitation and replacement options of the existing bridge and would like to hear the community's concerns, receive comments and answer questions from anyone with an interest in the project.

The Department will present information on the existing condition of the Falls Bridge and identify the rehabilitation & replacement options currently being considered. No specific design or detailed plans will be presented. This meeting is an opportunity for the public to ask questions and provide comment for further consideration by the Department and Bridge Advisory Committee.

Accommodations will be made for persons with disabilities. Auxiliary aids will be provided upon advanced request.

Any inquiries regarding this project may be directed to the attention of Andrew Lathe, Project Manager, Maine Department of Transportation, Highway Program, 16 State House Station, Augusta, Maine 04333-0016. Telephone: (207) 441-7362. Email: [andrew.w.lathe@maine.gov](mailto:andrew.w.lathe@maine.gov).

**Work Identification Number 017712.00  
Federal Aid Project Number STP-1771(200)X  
TTY Telephone (888) 516-9364**



Greater Portland Council of Governments

# Final Report

**December 2022**

*Adopted by the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System Policy Board January 26, 2023*





# Acknowledgements

The Transit Together team would like to acknowledge and thank the many people who contributed to this project, convening many times over more than a year to work towards improving the Greater Portland region's transit network and develop these recommendations.

## Greater Portland Region Transit Providers

### Biddeford-Saco-Old Orchard Beach Transit

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### Casco Bay Lines

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- PACTS RTAC members

### Transit Together Project Advisory Group

- See page 1-4

### GPCOG Community Transportation Leaders

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- Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, Inc.
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For assistance accessing this document or any of the materials included within, including with a screen-reading device, please e-mail [info@gpcog.org](mailto:info@gpcog.org) or call 207-774-9818.



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## **PLAN HIGHLIGHTS**

The Transit Together study brings together key transit partners in the Greater Portland region to help move towards a more seamless regional transit system. It includes recommendations for bus service improvements and strengthens multimodal connections. The plan also advances regional initiatives to bring local partners together to improve the transit experience for current riders, attract new riders, and make the transit system more effective and efficient.

A better, more seamless regional system includes:

### **MORE FREQUENT SERVICE**

The Greater Portland region's existing transit network includes six routes that operate less often than every 60 minutes, a level of frequency that is unusable for most people.

Under the Transit Together Recommended Service Plan, 10 routes will offer service every 30 minutes or better on weekdays. Frequency is increased on bus routes in places where there is high demand for transit, such as the Congress Street, Washington Avenue, and Brighton Avenue corridors in Portland; eastern South Portland; and the Alfred Street corridor in Biddeford. Route 21 in South Portland will provide 20-minute peak-period weekday service and a new Route 51 in Saco will provide bursts of 15-minute weekday service all day.

The Recommended Service Plan also increases frequency on other routes so that all but one arrives at least every hour.

## BETTER CONNECTIONS

For many years, transportation plans have called for improved connections to and among the Greater Portland region's transportation hubs—especially the Portland International Jetport, Portland Transportation Center (PTC), METRO PULSE bus hub, and Casco Bay Ferry Terminal. The Recommended Service Plan calls for many of these improved connections, including:

- **A new bus connection among the Jetport, PTC, and PULSE**, meaning local bus, intercity bus, Downeaster train, and air travelers can transfer services using only one bus route.
- **Three new bus connections to the Casco Bay Ferry Terminal**, for a total of four bus routes that serve the terminal. This greatly increases the number of mainlanders with access to ferry service, and the number of destinations islanders can access without transferring buses.
- **Three bus routes serving the PTC**, providing one-seat ride connections to train and intercity bus service for people traveling to and from Brunswick, Freeport, Yarmouth, Falmouth, East Deering, and downtown Portland.
- **Improved Connections to the Saco Transportation Center (STC)**, including hourly bus service connecting Sanford, Saco, Old Orchard Beach, Scarborough, and UNE to the station, and bus service every 30 minutes connecting the US Route 111/Alfred Street corridor to the station.
- **Buses connecting the Mill Creek Transit Hub in South Portland with the PULSE** every 20 minutes during weekday peak periods.

## ENHANCED RIDER EXPERIENCE

Over the course of the Transit Together study, transit operators were brought together to discuss the potential for working together to more efficiently use resources, attract new riders, and implement new technologies and customer-facing enhancements.

The study proposes varying levels of coordination within each initiative area based on a spectrum of cooperation as shown in Figure 1. These initiatives include:

- **Improving Bus Stops and Transit Hubs**
- **Enhancing Regional Information and Brand**
- **Making Fares and Trip Planning Easier**
- **Making Transit Faster, More Reliable, and More Sustainable**

Stop enhancements, technology investments and fleet upgrades will ensure a consistent, high-quality rider experience, and help agencies provide cost-effective and high-performance services.

**Figure 1** Graphic of Regional Coordination Levels



## MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

The Transit Together recommendations in this report were developed through a year-long process of interagency and stakeholder coordination. Most critically, the seven Greater Portland transit providers participated in three group workshops and numerous one-on-one meetings to identify areas of consensus and actions that will move the region towards a more cohesive regional network.

This forward momentum must be continued. Implementing Transit Together recommendations will depend on a continued commitment and dedication to working together. Regional coordination is also needed to identify and pursue additional funding to further increase bus service frequency and span, introduce new microtransit zones, and enhance the rider experience.

# 1 STUDY OVERVIEW

Transit Together is a comprehensive planning effort to evaluate and redesign the Greater Portland region's transit services. It is also an opportunity to advance regional initiatives to improve the transit experience for current riders, attract new riders, and make the overall system more effective and efficient.

This report identifies opportunities for improved bus service and increased coordination and integration among the Greater Portland region's seven public transit providers.

This study was conducted on behalf of the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) which houses the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS), the region's metropolitan planning organization. The study was funded by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act through the Federal Transit Administration.

## REGIONAL GOALS

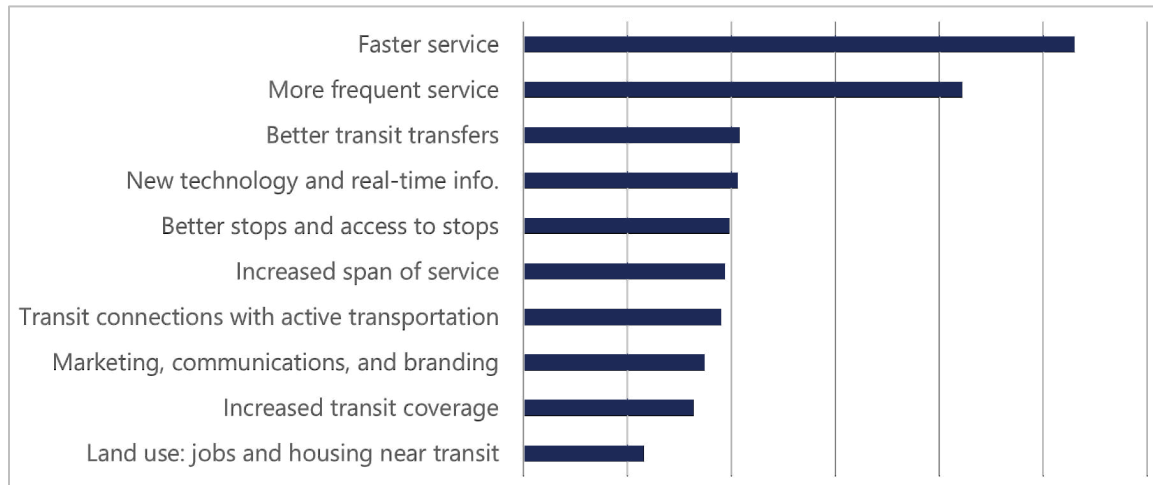
This study was rooted in the context of *Transit Tomorrow*, an ambitious 30-year strategic plan for enhancing public transportation in the Greater Portland region. Adopted in spring of 2021, *Transit Tomorrow* outlines a four-part strategy to achieve its vision:

- **Make transit easier for riders**
- **Create frequent connections**
- **Invest in rapid transit**
- **Create transit-friendly places**

Transit Together builds upon the vision and goals of *Transit Tomorrow* by focusing on the first two goals. It recommends improvements to transit frequency in areas with high demand to create better connections and to work together to make the network more easily understood and used by riders.

Transit Together’s recommendations are also based on years of public feedback that GPCOG has received during various transit-related studies. The public’s priorities for transit, which are shown in Figure 2, are primarily for faster and more frequent service.

**Figure 2 Greater Portland Region Public Priorities for Transit**



Sources: Transit Tomorrow, Transit Stop Access Project, Route 1 North Plan, Active Transportation Plan, Moving Southern Maine Forward, Destination 2040, Regional Passenger Survey, North Windham Downtown Plan, Congress Street Bus Priority Plan, Gorham East-West Connector Plan, Destination Tomorrow 2006 and 2010, Portland Peninsula Transit Plan, Regional Transit Coordination Study.

## PLAN TIMELINE

The Transit Together study began in the summer of 2021 and consisted of three phases:

- **Phase 1: State of the Region** — The study team conducted a comprehensive discovery and analysis process to determine how efficiently and effectively the Greater Portland region’s transit providers serve the region’s mobility and access needs. This work also identified opportunities for service improvement, including new service models, policies, and programs. During this phase, the study team held a virtual public meeting to hear directly from riders, and published route profiles on the project website for comment.
- **Phase 2: Recommendations Development** — The study team designed two service scenarios to improve the region’s fixed-route bus network and proposed regional initiatives to improve coordination among providers and provide a seamless, consistent rider experience. The study team held two agency workshops to work together on the improvement scenarios. At the conclusion of this phase, the study team conducted rider and stakeholder outreach to collect feedback on draft scenarios and initiatives.

- **Phase 3: Implementation Plan and Final Report Development** — The study team refined the draft service recommendations based on community and agency input. The team also identified multiple regional initiatives to advance, and identified unfunded but priority service improvements, including the development of a regional microtransit program. One final round of public and stakeholder input informed the final recommendations.

## HOW DID WE ENGAGE THE PUBLIC?

A project website, [www.transittogether.org](http://www.transittogether.org), kept the public and project partners informed throughout the project. Additional outreach was conducted in three phases:

- **Phase 1: Outreach (Winter 2021/2022)** — The study team presented findings from the State of Regional Transit report at a virtual public meeting and guided the public on how to find, review, and comment on the route profiles prepared for each transit route in the region. The team also presented to GPCOG’s Community Transportation Leaders program and collected feedback from that group. Public comments were shared with the respective agencies and used to develop two potential service improvement scenarios.
- **Phase 2: Outreach (Summer 2022)** — GPCOG and regional transit agencies conducted an extensive social media and general marketing campaign to solicit feedback on two transit service improvement scenarios. As part of this campaign, the study team held 10 informational ‘pop-up’ events held around the region, many in conjunction with the Gorham-Westbrook-Portland Rapid Transit Study. About 230 people engaged with the study team during these pop-ups.



Above: images of staff conducting public outreach pop-up events in the Greater Portland Region.  
Source: GPCOG and Nelson\Nygaard.

### Gorham-Westbrook-Portland Rapid Transit Study

The Gorham-Westbrook-Portland Rapid Transit Study examines the need for and benefits of various potential alignments and modes of rapid transit linking the municipalities of Gorham, Westbrook, and Portland. The study area can generally be defined as the area from University of Southern Maine (USM) Gorham in the west to the Portland Peninsula in the east, including several potential east-west road and rail alignments connecting these areas.

During this phase, the study team provided a second presentation to the Community Transportation Leaders program. These in-person and online marketing efforts garnered over 375 survey responses. After outreach was complete, public feedback was organized by route or topic and used to develop recommendations.

- **Phase 3: Outreach (Winter 2022/2023)** — An online StoryMap of proposed Transit Together recommendations was shared with the public prior to review and adoption by PACTS. The StoryMap included detailed information on recommendations, as well as a public comment form.

## WHO INFORMED THE STUDY TEAM?

**A Transit Together Project Advisory Group (PAG) guided the project team throughout the study.** The PAG ensured our analysis and resulting recommendations were technically sound and considered diverse regional interests. In addition to several representatives from each transit agency, the group included key leaders and stakeholders from throughout the region, including:

- Maine Department of Transportation
- Maine Turnpike Authority
- MaineHealth
- Move to ME
- Portland Housing Authority
- Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Southern Maine Community College
- Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission
- United Way of Southern Maine
- University of Southern Maine

The group met five times to provide input and guidance at key project milestones:

1. **Project Kickoff (October 2022)**
  - The PAG provided input on transit priorities, as well as suggestions for engaging the public over the course of the project.
2. **Existing Conditions/Market Demand/Microtransit Overview** (December 2021)
  - The PAG highlighted new developments, areas with changing populations, key corridors, and unique markets such as the Casco Bay islands and tourism



in general. The group also provided a checkpoint on data assumptions, particularly given the impacts of COVID.

3. **State of Regional Transit and Potential Opportunities** (April 2022)
  - Key findings were discussed in small (virtual) groups. PAG priorities included higher service frequencies, improved service reliability, improved bus stops and regional information, and continuing to work together to develop regional and equitable standards for service delivery.
  - The concept of service scenarios was introduced as a means of testing service ideas with the public. The PAG highlighted that different types of service should be used to meet demand in higher and lower density areas.
4. **Service Improvement Scenarios/Regional Initiatives** (August 2022)
  - Details emerging from agency workshops on service improvement scenarios and initiatives to enhance the rider experience were shared. The PAG provided comments and suggestions for Fall 2022 public outreach.
5. **Draft Recommendations** (November 2022)
  - Draft recommendations were shared in the form of an online StoryMap. PAG members provided comments to facilitate public review and to clarify which recommendations are cost-neutral and which require more funding due to regional funding limitations.

The project team also met twice with **GPCOG's Community Transportation Leaders**. This group provided important feedback and guidance, including:

- **State of Regional Transit and Opportunities** (March 2022)
  - CTL members discussed transit priorities, highlighting a need to improve service frequency, enhance accessibility, and add more weekday service. The group expressed interest in a better rider experience, including better information (maps, real time information, schedules, and signage), regional fare payment and the potential for microtransit.
- **Bus Service Improvement Scenarios** (September 2022)
  - Two draft service improvement scenarios were shared for CTL comment. The group expressed a need for more weekday service and great interest in the idea of an on-demand service model such as microtransit.
  - CTL priorities for enhancing the rider experience included more bus shelters and transit stop amenities, accessibility improvements and better information (e.g., in other languages). Other suggestions included offering more special event service, building more hubs with local circulators, and better serving the tourism market.

## 6 MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

Implementing Transit Together recommendations depends on a continued commitment to working together across agencies and stakeholder groups. It will also require additional levels of funding. The Transit Together Recommendations Action Plan (see Figure 21) summarizes recommendations and identified actions steps. It provides a framework to guide future planning decisions and regional transit investments.

### CONDUCT ONGOING REGIONAL COORDINATION

As the region’s metropolitan planning organization, PACTS is responsible for facilitating a collaborative process to prioritize limited federal transportation funding. The Transit Task Force, which is made up of the seven transit agencies, PACTS chairs, and MaineDOT, is one avenue to inform that decision making process. The Transit Task Force is recommended to lead implementation of several key components of this plan, including coordination of transit service planning and the design and advancing of regional transit enhancements and technology.

**Key tasks related to implementing Transit Together recommendations include:**

- **Developing Regional Bus-Service Standards**
- **Developing a Microtransit Roadmap**
- **Conducting Periodic Service Review and Coordination Meetings**
- **Advancing Regional Initiatives**



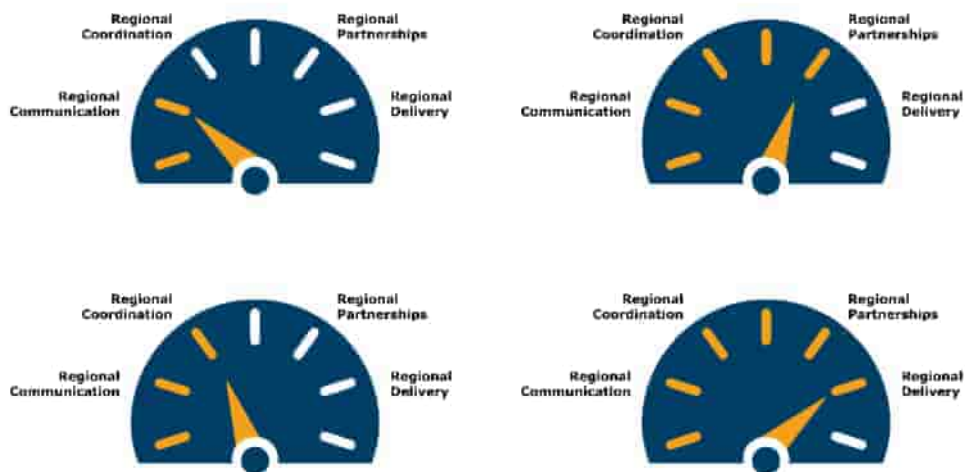
Regional transit staff came together at three workshops to identify areas of consensus and develop Transit Together recommendations.

## ADVANCE REGIONAL INITIATIVES

Chapter 5, Regional Initiatives, outlined a series of action items related to enhancing service for the rider, making technology upgrades, and working regionally on more programs to introduce efficiencies and make riding transit an easier and more seamless experience.

Levels of coordination will vary across individual tasks. For some efforts, such as schedule changes at intermodal hubs, only communication would be needed. Other tasks, such as development of bus-stop design guidelines, will require more coordination. Regional technology upgrades, branding efforts, or joint procurements to provide a common real-time information app, fare payment, or bus charging stations might require a more formal effort with interagency memoranda of agreement.

**Figure 19** Graphic of Transit Coordination Levels



Transit Together recommends GPCOG staff support the Transit Task Force and other coordination efforts by performing technology research, offering procurement support, writing grant applications, and completing other tasks.

Tasks related to funding prioritization (for example, for transit stop improvements) will fall to the RTAC and PACTS Policy Board. These committees are also ultimately responsible for making sure investment actions and priorities align with other plans such as *Transit Tomorrow, Connect 2045*, and *Maine Won't Wait*.

#### Transit Together Convention

To keep the spirit of interagency cooperation intact and to update regional priorities as time moves on, we recommend an **annual** convening of the seven transit agency boards. Joint board meetings were held in 2007, 2012, and 2019, and proved to be successful venues for obtaining individual agency buy-in and setting strategic direction.

#### Action Steps:

- Hold **joint transit board meeting (or Transit Together convention)**. Make this an annual event to reaffirm priorities and strategies for the year ahead. Obtain buy-in to advance critical-path items within the structure of PACTS Transit Task Force and other committees:
  - Regional service standards (including Microtransit Roadmap)
  - Reinitiated regionwide branding study (including microtransit brand)
  - Bus-stop design guidelines
- **Transit Task Force leads:**
  - Family of services and regional service standards
  - Bus-stop classification hierarchy
  - Microtransit pilot guidelines and draft roadmap
- **GPCOG leads** in initiating coordination with state/MaineDOT on:
  - Fare payment integration
  - AVL, real-time information, and other technologies
  - Scheduling software technology, pilots, and goals for microtransit and other on-demand transportation

## PURSUE ADDITIONAL FUNDING

The region receives a limited level of federal funding for transit each year, with the remaining needed funds largely made up by municipal contributions.

Today, the region's transit providers struggle to adequately meet transit demand across areas of mixed density. Difficult decisions and tradeoffs must be made. The providers are also working to address challenges such as ridership declines due to the COVID-19

pandemic, outstanding preventative maintenance needs, and desired fleet and technology upgrades.

Additional funding is needed to implement service improvements beyond the Recommended Service Plan and to advance Regional Initiatives to enhance the rider experience.

While the region benefitted from an infusion of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds during the pandemic, this level of funding is not currently anticipated to continue over the longer term. It is important to set and identify regional priorities to guide investments as federal funding levels vary year to year. Regional transit agencies should work together with local and regional governments to explore options for a new transit funding source to help the region grow sustainably.

## **Future Bus Service Improvements**

The evaluation of regional transit demand and ridership data performed as part of the Transit Together study identified a need for additional service frequency and span of both weekday and weekend service. New needed connections that are not being served today were also identified. Due to the cost-constrained nature of the Recommended Service Plan, many of the changes that would help address these needs were not able to be included. Additional recommendations to implement microtransit, especially in South Portland, where replacement of fixed route service is critical to moving the Recommended Service Plan forward, would require additional resources beyond what is available for the Recommended Service Plan.

New and expanded service would make transit more useful for more types of trips, and demand is likely to persist and grow over the next few years. If additional funding becomes available, it could be used to operate an improved transit network and thereby increase ridership.

Other recommendations made in this report, such as regional route classifications, stop improvements, enhanced rider information, and technology investments will also make service more attractive for current and potential future riders.

Many daily riders use routes operated by two or more agencies and often have long waits between transfers. This results in transit travel times that greatly exceed the time it would take to make the same trip in a car.

**Additional Service Needs Include:**

- **Frequency improvements**, including 15-minute service on Route 4; 30-minute service on Routes 1, 3, 7, 8B, 24, 54, 60, and BREEZ; and 60-minute service on the Lakes Region Explorer.
- **Span improvements**, including late-night service on key routes serving the hospitality industry or new microtransit service, Saturday service on the Southern Maine Connector, and Sunday service on the BREEZ, Lakes Region Explorer, and Southern Maine Connector.
- **Three microtransit zones**. Future implementation would require additional resources to acquire or lease vehicles, procure scheduling software and app technology, hire drivers, and operate service.
- **A new bus route** connecting Brick Hill in South Portland directly with the Portland Peninsula.

**Figure 20 Estimated Costs for Additional Service Improvements**

Additional Service Improvements	Annual Operating Costs	One-Time Capital Costs
Frequency Upgrades	\$6,740,000	\$13,500,000
Extended Service Span	\$860,000	-
Three New Microtransit Zones	\$3,290,000	\$1,570,000
New Bus Route	\$1,110,000	\$2,000,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$12,000,000</b>	<b>\$17,070,000</b>

Note: One-time capital costs are current cost estimates for new cutaway and electric fixed-route buses.

**Action Steps:**

- GPCOG to work with agencies, PACTS, and MaineDOT to **identify funding** for unfunded service recommendations (for example, additional fixed-route bus frequency).
- GPCOG to help **pursue federal discretionary grants** (or other funding sources such as MaineDOT RTAP funds) for:
  - Microtransit initial start-up costs (i.e., vehicles, scheduling technology, app)
  - Bus-stop design guidelines (to be adopted by agency boards)
  - Bus-stop improvements
  - Regional branding study (following joint agency board direction)
  - Enhanced integrated regional rider tools (whether expanding DiriGO or SMTT, or funding the recommended Transit App’s Royale upgrade for the region).

## **Transit Together Action Plan and Timeline**

A **Transit Together Recommendations Action Plan** is in Figure 21. This plan aims to serve as a summary of Transit Together recommendations and reference document to guide near-term planning decisions and investments.

The table organizes each recommendation into one of three timeframes:

- Near Term: 0 to 6 months
- Medium Term: 6 to 18 months
- Long Term: 18 months+

Figure 21 Transit Together Recommendations Action Plan

Recommendation	Timeframe	Actions to Move Us Forward	Implementation Timeframe
<b>Implement Recommended Service Plan</b>	<b>Near Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fixed-route bus agencies conduct Title VI analysis and agency-specific public outreach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Near Term: 0 to 6 months</b></li> <li><b>Medium Term: 6 to 18 months</b></li> <li><b>Long Term: 18 months+</b></li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agency boards and South Portland City Council approve changes as required.</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install/remove bus stops as needed for service changes. Prepare new bus schedules.</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate timing of service changes among agencies, so riders see benefits of changes that involve multiple operators.</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with GPCOG to conduct a regionwide public outreach and education campaign to present service changes in regional context.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Medium Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate a quarterly Service Review and Coordination meeting for fixed-route bus providers.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with municipal, state, and private partners to implement recommended roadway, pedestrian, and bus turnaround improvements.</li> </ul>			
<b>Improve Bus Stops and Transit Hubs</b>	<b>Near Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt and use a transit stop typology based on ridership and other factors to determine amenities at transit stops.</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and maintain a regional transit stop inventory and bus-stop improvement program to monitor, upgrade and maintain signage, amenities, and ADA accessibility.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Medium Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop regional, unified, bus-stop signage specifications and design guidelines (sign information and placement, colors, etc.). Estimate costs by stop type.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Longer Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a regional procurement contract to ensure consistency in regional design and amenities offered.</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor and update stop prioritization for investment as funding opportunities become available and ridership changes.</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage MaineDOT and/or municipal partners to oversee design and construction of stop improvements.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support Portland Transportation Center relocation to increase ridership on the Downeaster through a better bus network connection.</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support development of a transit priority corridor on Congress Street, including transit operations priority (for example, TSP), passenger amenities, and wayfinding.</li> </ul>			
<b>Enhance Regional Information and Brand</b>	<b>Near Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop regional route-numbering and -naming conventions organized around a family of services (for example, rapid routes, local routes). Develop regional bus schedule standards.</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop guidelines to ensure individual agency websites help present a cohesive regional network (for example, links to regional map, transfer information, microtransit information). Work with other partners (for example, Visit Portland) to similarly portray the whole network.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Medium Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct a regional branding study to enhance ease of use and understanding of the regional transit network. Respect individual brands and unique agency missions but pursue unified branding elements (for example, icons, color templates, style guide)</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create regional materials to present network in cohesive form (for example, regional transit map, similar bus schedule templates) Update annually.</li> </ul>	
<b>Longer Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporate regional brand or icon on websites, maps, communication materials, and transit-stop signage.</li> </ul>		
<b>Make Fares and Trip Planning Easier</b>	<b>Near Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify individual agency goals and criteria for regional fare payment (for example, future fare payment with credit cards, cash flow, ADA and intermodal integration, transfers). Coordinate with MaineDOT on statewide goals.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Medium Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work within Dirigo to explore whether existing system can meet goals identified above.</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a regional fare policy that supports each agency's fare structure. Establish policies for transfers, family accounts, youth fares, premium services, etc.</li> <li>Integrate regional fare payment on RTP and YCCAC fixed routes. Pursue support from CBL and NNEPRA to adopt identified strategies or systems.</li> </ul>	



Recommendation	Timeframe	Actions to Move Us Forward
<b>Make Buses Faster, More Reliable, and More Sustainable</b>	<b>Near Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide GTFS-RT feeds for all fixed routes in the region.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey transit agencies to inventory existing technology, replacement needs, and gaps in new technology. Coordinate with MaineDOT on similar statewide technology efforts.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify desired real time information app (e.g., transitioning away from Southern Maine Transit Tracker (SMTT) to Transit App to reduce local technology maintenance needs (SMTT software can be retained if needed in future). Consider upgrading all regional or state riders to Transit App Royale. Address concerns regarding non-bus integration.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with GPGOG to acquire Remix transit planning software for all fixed-route bus operators.</li> </ul>
	<b>Medium Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate with MaineDOT on regional bus electrification, select desired future technology and work with GPCOG to establish targets for fleet transition.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in automatic vehicle locator (AVL) technology for all fixed-route transit providers to enhance GTFS reliability for customer-facing tools (under way).</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in automated passenger counters (APCs) and develop a regionwide quarterly ridership report for agencies to better understand transit use throughout the region.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider regional or state procurements for fleet transition to minimize customization and reduce cost for transit agencies.</li> <li>Assess maintenance facility readiness and on-route charging locations based on selected technology. Consider opportunities to introduce regional efficiencies (for example, parts inventory, charger maintenance, shared layover)</li> </ul>
	<b>Longer Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a regional transit signal priority program in coordination with MaineDOT and local communities.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support efforts to make required facility upgrades to accommodate zero-emission fleets.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support efforts to secure onsite battery storage for Casco Bay Lines and longer-term proposals to transition ferry and rail away from fossil fuels.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support efforts to relocate Portland's Downeaster station to be better positioned to serve the Peninsula and integrate with the fixed-route bus system.</li> </ul>
<b>Conduct Ongoing Regional Coordination</b>	<b>Near Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convene boards of seven regional transit agencies for the first annual Transit Together annual conference. Obtain strategic direction and buy-in on near-term actions steps (for example, bus-stop improvement, family of services and bus route classification, reinitiating regionwide branding study).</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold regular bus service review and coordination meetings with fixed-route bus providers; add other providers seasonally.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop regional service standards for the 'family of services', using standard units of measurement and consistent data. Standards could classify each route by type and set minimum thresholds for span and frequency. Standards should include a process or policy for reviewing standards, and consider different densities, land uses, and road conditions.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create initial Regional Microtransit Roadmap to guide microtransit pilot design (service parameters, scheduling technology, apps and communications, etc.).</li> </ul>
	<b>Medium Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate with MaineDOT to align with statewide goals on fare payment, technology, and on-demand transportation.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a policy for periodically reviewing regional bus-service standards and use performance (by family classification) to consider service adjustments.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess microtransit pilots (ridership, impact on existing services) and refine Regional Microtransit Roadmap.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop regional microtransit procurement strategy and prioritization framework (based on equity, access, climate/sustainability, cost, use cases, etc.).</li> <li>Develop microtransit co-branding strategy (as part of regional branding, see Enhance Regional Information and Brand above).</li> </ul>
<b>Pursue Additional Funding</b>	<b>Medium to Long Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify funding for fixed-route bus service frequency and span not included in cost neutral recommendations, and for microtransit zones.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pursue federal discretionary grants and other funding sources to support start-up costs for microtransit and to advance regional initiatives.</li> </ul>

**Implementation Timeframe**

- Near Term: 0 to 6 months**
- Medium Term: 6 to 18 months**
- Long Term: 18 months+**