

PACTS

Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee



Planning Committee Meeting Notice

Thursday, May 4, 2006
9:00 a.m.

PACTS, 68 Marginal Way, Portland

There are parking spaces available across Marginal Way and across Preble Street.

Agenda

1. Call to order
2. Minutes of April 6th meeting
3. 2006 Destination Tomorrow Plan (Attachment)

Staff recommends a Planning Committee vote to forward the draft recommendations to the Policy Committee after a final review today of the attachment and report chapters sent earlier.

Eric Ortman will provide some highlights of the chapters.

4. Other Business
5. Adjourn

Next Meeting: June 1st at 9:00 a.m.

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PACTS Planning Committee Minutes
April 6, 2006 Meeting
9:00 a.m.

Members Present: Dawn Emerson, Yarmouth; Deb Fossum, Gorham; Alex Jaegerman, Portland; Donna Larson, Freeport; Mike LaBerge, MaineDOT; Brooks Moore, Westbrook; Peter Morelli, Chair, Saco; Steve Puleo, South Portland (for Tex Haeuser); Tom Reinauer, SMRPC; Greg Tansley, Biddeford; George Theborge, Falmouth, Conrad Welzel, MTA; David Willauer, GPCOG.

Members Absent: Wayne Davis, TrainRiders; Sandra lie, Old Orchard Beach; Steve Linnell, GPCOG; Jon McNulty, Public Transportation; Carla Nixon, Cumberland; Maureen O'Meara, Cape Elizabeth; John Perry, FHWA; Joe Ziepniewski, Scarborough.

Staff and Guests: Julia Dawson, PACTS; John Duncan, PACTS; Dennis Emidy, Maine DOT; Ed Hanscom, Maine DOT; Peggy Kilmer, Yarmouth resident; Sue McIntyre, GPCOG; Eric Ortman, PACTS.

1. **Call to Order.** Peter Morelli, Chair called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Introductions were made around the table.

2. **Minutes of March 2nd, Meeting**

Greg Tansley moved for approval of the minutes, seconded by Donna Larson. All were in favor. The minutes were unanimously accepted.

3. **2006 Destination Tomorrow Plan (Attachments)** (Item taken out of order)

D. Next steps to prepare for final committee action on May 4th

John Duncan referred to the handout entitled "Completion of the 2006 Destination Tomorrow Plan" and presented an overview of the key differences and policies between the 2003 and 2006 Plans. He noted that Destination Tomorrow is being written with more emphasis on policy and includes a 20-year financial needs forecast. It also speaks of an interstate highway study, project recommendations and as well as a toll road recommendation for the east-west corridor. Staff will send out the seven chapters to Maine DOT, SMRPC, GPCOG, the Turnpike Authority and the Planning Committee as well as the consultants for review and feedback. Eric Ortman has been working on an air quality conformity analysis with Maine DOT and the DEP in conjunction with Destination Tomorrow as well. The Policy Committee might be adopting the Plan on June 2nd. A public hearing is scheduled for April 12th, 2006 and a public information handout will be distributed at the annual meeting on June 2nd, 2006. The plan will be updated in four years as appropriate, as required by the federal highway administration.

Peggy Kilmer asked how the public hearing would be advertised. John replied that an ad would be published in the newspaper as well as an email to a large number of interested parties. Last year, a display ad was published in the "Forecaster" as well as in the "Portland Press Herald." Ms. Kilmer felt that submitting a written article on Destination Tomorrow might also be a good idea.

A. Review of Maine DOT's I-295 Corridor Study recommendations with Ed Hanscom, Manager of the Transportation Analysis Section in Maine DOT's Bureau of Planning.

John Duncan noted that Maine DOT is very close to finalizing their study and the Department feels that Destination Tomorrow is in good shape in regards to what it would like incorporated into the plan. The floor was turned over to Ed Hanscom who proceeded to elaborate on MaineDOT's planning process.

The I-295 Corridor Study began in December of 2003 with the establishment of a Corridor Advisory Committee that consisted of municipal representatives from Scarborough to Brunswick, as well as, representatives from the Maine Turnpike Authority, GPCOG, PACTS, the Maine State Police, and public transit. This Advisory Committee developed a purpose and needs statement to insure that the I-295 corridor operates at a reasonable level of service between now and 2025. A series of public meetings were held throughout this study period and a wide range of strategies was studied. Mr. Hanscom noted that future congestion levels would increase greatly on I-295 resulting in "E" and "F" levels of service. An updated chart was distributed which contained a combination of recommendations that have been put together by the Maine DOT to address these problems. An overview of the chart was given.

In reference to “near term” recommendations, Mr. Hanscom noted that the closest to implementation would be the variable signing improvements. Signage would be located southbound (SB) on I-295 between Falmouth and Portland while the other would be located northbound (NB) on I-295 in South Portland between Exits 3 and 4. Another recommendation includes establishing a SB auxiliary lane between exits 4 and 3. Additional near term recommendations would include service patrols. These are vehicles that would be dedicated to patrolling I-295 from Scarborough to Brunswick during times of heavy traffic to insure that incidents that occur, such as out of gas car, a crash, debris in the road, etc. would get resolved as quickly as possible to get the traffic flow moving again. It is considered a good way to maximize efficiency on the highway.

Other recommendations included: Adding an auxiliary lane NB in South Portland from Exit 3 and 4; adding an acceleration lane at Exit 11 in Falmouth at the Spur Exit; adding an auxiliary lane and improvements at Exit 7 (this would include both off ramps); and doing interchange improvements at Exit 15. It was noted that Exit 15 is listed as #7 in the spreadsheet that was distributed with the agenda packet. There could be two recommendations for this Exit, one for the SB on-ramp and the other for the NB on-ramp. MaineDOT decided to split those out to give more flexibility in funding and scheduling. The SB on-ramp improvement is basically the reconstruction of the on-ramp to make it safer. In reference to the NB at that same interchange, there would be construction of the new ramp, the NB ramp, now. There are also interchange improvements at the cloverleaf off-ramps at Exit 6 where those off-ramps merge into Forest Avenue. Mr. Hanscom noted that the Department would recommend in the future looking at the toll issues to see if there are ways to manage and improve mobility in the I-295 corridor. A limited look at tolls was done and the study showed some promise, but there are more issues that would need to be considered including institutional issues.

A long-term recommendation was included for commuter rail. This would be the long-term commuter transit service to serve the Portland Peninsula. The department felt this was a logical place to start especially if the Exit 15 improvements are made as recommended. It would be a Yarmouth to Portland link. In looking further into the future, expansion of the commuter rail could take place. There have been talks of Brunswick or Freeport as possibilities as well as a station in Falmouth. A rail line going south was considered as well.

Mr. Hanscom spoke of Exit 4 in South Portland stating it was not a full service interchange. There are recommendations to make it more easily accessible from Route 1. In reference to the Forest Avenue interchange, various improvements such as a cloverleaf design interchange with short weaving were considered to make it better. Other strategies for this interchange include adding a thru lane in each direction between Exits 5 and 7. It was felt that this latter strategy would work the best. It also resulted in the best LOS.

Another recommendation involves the support of the Maine Turnpike’s plan to add thru lanes to connect to I-95 between Scarborough and the Portland North Exit. In looking at the PACTS model it was found that this is one of the strategies that can divert thru traffic away from I-295. A capacity recommendation that is quite a bit further out in the future would be the addition of thru lanes between Exit 11 and Exit 15. If there were a need in the future to add thru lanes on I-95 north of the Falmouth Spur it most likely would occur at that particular section. Mr. Hanscom also spoke of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), stating that Maine DOT sees that strategy as developing gradually over the years with greater capabilities to monitor traffic with sensors and/or video that would help develop improved protocol and other means of communicating with motorists. There is also a need to address better acceleration and deceleration lanes particularly in the northern part of the corridor. He noted the importance of continuing to monitor the I-295 corridor as conditions change due to such future unknowns like growth pressures, energy concerns, changes in technology, etc.

B. *Committee action on the draft recommendations for the I-295 and Turnpike corridors.*

Peter Morelli opened the floor to questions and/or comments. Greg Tansley directed the group to lines #16 and #17 in the spreadsheet and asked for clarification of the term “not commuter rail” that was listed in brackets. Mr. Morelli explained that those item numbers refer to what is currently effective and is endorsing what was in the works at the time. Mr. Tansley noted that this item number seems to be referring to commuter rail from the north only. He asked why there was no language about commuter rail going south of Portland, specifically, to the Biddeford-Saco area. He felt that the language should be expanded to include that area.

Mr. Hanscom explained that the Department had looked at possible train stations in Scarborough, Old Orchard Beach, and Biddeford-Saco and also a train station possibly further out on Route 1 in Biddeford that intersects the Route 111 connector at Precourt Street. This area would be convenient for those working further out. He noted that it would be part of this recommendation. A discussion followed. Mr. Tansley felt that a commuter rail south of Portland warranted specific citation in the recommendations and should be included.

George Theborge asked about the Variable Message Signage being recommended for a location before Exit 11 heading southbound. Mr. Hanscom clarified that there is an existing sign for SB traffic north of the Falmouth spur and that could be part of the messaging system. Mr. Theborge spoke of the toll study and expressed concern in putting a toll on I-295. He noted that it virtually is impossible to change the federal toll system. However, he felt there is a potential if you look at the tollbooth on the spur. In reference to interchange access for Exit 11, he asked about the 11-year timeframe and if that included both the planning and construction phases. Mr. Hanscom replied that the planning phase would begin before then.

Alex Jaegerman referred to lines #5 and #6 and said that line #5 seemed consistent with Portland's plan. In regards to the ramp improvements mentioned in line #6, he noted that Portland was fine with the recommendations for both the auxiliary lanes and ramp improvements. He felt that the NB and SB lanes at Exit 7 should be two lanes and he also said he felt that the Committee should make Destination Tomorrow compatible with that recommendation. In reference to line #11, he noted that Destination Tomorrow is pretty much in sync with Portland's plan. Mr. Jaegerman said he was comfortable with the recommendations. In regards to the idea of adding lanes between Exits 5 and 7, if the widening is done internally, he is okay with that also. John Duncan said he felt that they were different. He noted that the words to be tweaked in the Destination Tomorrow Plan would be "auxiliary lanes". A discussion followed on that wording. Mr. Hanscom explained that it wouldn't physically be done. The old right hand thru lane would be more like an auxiliary lane and overhead signage could be used to keep thru traffic in the left and middle lanes. He noted that the Department had looked at collector distributors but there wasn't enough room for a collector distributor. Mr. Jaegerman felt that the plan should be amended so it endorses the plan of adding the thru lanes in the middle and maybe a semi-collector system. Eric Ortman noted that in doing so it would drop the reconfiguration of the Forest Avenue interchange and this is not what Maine DOT is considering. They are considering improvement on the ramps. John said the reconfiguration should be dropped. Even with the addition of a lane in the median, Mr. Jaegerman was not totally convinced that that would solve the problem. Mr. Hanscom said the Department had looked at several reconfigurations and all of them had resulted in a LOS "F" and noted that the bottom line is that there is not enough room to create a different reconfiguration. After further discussion, it was agreed that the Planning Committee didn't need to make Destination Tomorrow totally in sync with Maine DOT's recommendations.

Conrad Welzel spoke of Maine DOT's updated chart and referred to the toll strategies. He felt it kept everything in sync and allowed the Destination Tomorrow language to change for the future vs. the Maine Turnpike Authority adopting a toll, etc. He also noted that funding is not mentioned anywhere and felt that might be a topic for further discussion.

A review of each line # along with the recommendations followed.

Line #1 – Auxiliary Lanes: The Committee decided to add the words "should include but not be limited to" and to drop the second sentence in the Destination Tomorrow's recommendation.

Line #2 – Tukey's Bridge: There was consensus among the group to replace the word "study" with the word "monitor" in Destination Tomorrow's recommendation.

Line #3 – Interchange Improvements: The committee accepted the MaineDOT recommendations.

Line #4 – Interchange Improvements: The committee accepted the MaineDOT recommendations.

Line #5 – Ramp Improvements: Alex said he would endorse this recommendation but that the issue comes up again in line #11. After some discussion, it was decided to drop the language on Tukey's Bridge in line #2 and replace it with "enhance regional mobility by making interchange improvements"

and replace the wording in line # 5 with “continue to monitor safety, congestion and capacity issues at Tukey’s Bridge”.

Line #11 – Capacity: Alex agreed with the NB and SB thru lanes from Exits 5, 6, and 7 but would like to see those in the median. He also said he would like to leave room for a collector distributor but there isn’t enough room for one.

Line #6 – Ramp Improvements: Alex said he would support the language on this one.

Line #7 – Ramp Improvements: The Committee agreed to add Maine Dot’s language.

Line #8 and # 9 – Other Short Term Recommendations: The Committee will add the language.

Line #10 – Auxiliary Lanes: The Committee will add the language.

Line #12 – Capacity: Destination Tomorrow language will say, “evaluate building those lanes”.

Line #13 – Interchange Improvements: A discussion ensued pertaining to the short-term recommendations for this interchange vs. the long-term recommendations. It was decided to add the word “reconfigure” in the language, i.e., “study ways to reconfigure and address safety”.

Line #14 – Other Long-term Recommendations: Traffic Management Systems were discussed. Conrad said he would like to remove the word “freeway” from the recommendation. It was decided to replace the word “freeway” with “interstate”.

Line #15 – Other Long-term Recommendations: Conrad Welzel agreed that the Turnpike Authority and the Maine DOT should continue to investigate tolling strategies in the Turnpike and 295 corridors to manage and improve interstate mobility including a regional toll system and an “open road” tolling structure as one of the strategies to be investigated.

Line #16 and Line #17 – Other Long-term Recommendations: A discussion on passenger rail vs. commuter rail and buses ensued. Wording was also discussed. It was decided to include the words “passenger rail, commuter rail, and bus, from Portland north to Brunswick and Portland south to Biddeford/Saco”.

Line #18 – Maine Turnpike: Conrad Welzel spoke of the I-295 study vs. the widening of the Maine Turnpike. He noted that as long as one doesn’t conflict with the other, he had no problems with the 295 Study. A discussion on regional tolls ensued. Greg Tansley suggested the following language “MTA should study strategies including a toll system”. It was decided to keep the language in Greg’s suggestion.

C. Review of MaineDOT comments received at yesterday’s briefing.

A brief overview and discussion of the MaineDOT comments took place.

4. Other Business:

The PACTS Technical Committee is scheduled to meet at 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday, April 11th, 2006. Steve Landry will be making a presentation on traffic calming.

It was noted that Tony Barrett from East Coast Greenway Trails would like to make a brief presentation at one of the Planning Committee meetings. The members asked that Steve Workman be invited also.

David Willauer noted that GPCOG would be assisting with the organization of a multi-agency bus transit symposium in May. The municipalities and USM will host the symposium. COG is taking the lead with the organization and would welcome some input.

5. Adjourn:

The next meeting is scheduled for May 4th, 2006 at 9:00 a.m. in the GPCOG Conference Room. Meeting adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

Destination Tomorrow Topics for May 4th

If all goes well the Policy Committee will formally adopt the Plan on June 2nd! It has been a long time coming, and is the product of countless hours of our collective time since we began the 2003 Plan work in 1999 and then began our update/expansion work in 2003. Our recent successful uses of the Plan in our TIP and studies selection processes bode well for its continued use in the future. Our plan is to complete the report editing, formatting and printing by July 1st.

Eric Ortman will take the members through the chapters during the meeting. Please bring copies of chapters sent to you on April 14th. Here are some highlights.

Chapter 1: Executive Summary

1. Same format and purpose as 2003 chapter.
2. Staff suggests the addition of language in this chapter and in Chapter 5 that highlight how the Plan includes numerous strategies aimed at sustainability. We want to highlight the Plan's sustainability aspect because it is such an important subject, and because of the new reality in oil prices. We will send you a proposal later today.

Chapter 2: Plan Background

We have incorporated last summer's suggestions from the Planning Committee and the staff/consultant team.

Chapter 3: Present and Future Conditions

1. We are sending out this chapter for review along with this memorandum. We suggest a May 12th deadline for your comments on it. (We have had to remove most of the graphics in order to email it. We will have paper copies with graphics available on Thursday.)
2. It is important to note that the chapter describes less 2025 congestion than our 2003 Plan did because of reduced regional and statewide forecasts of population and employment growth.

Chapter 4: Alternatives Analysis

1. We will complete a final draft for your review by May 26th. We would appreciate your comments on it by June 9th. Completion of this chapter has been delayed by recent demands on PACTS staff relating to TIP project work with MaineDOT and the Policy Committee.
2. The "DTx" Subcommittee and the staff/consultant team completed the analysis for this chapter in 2004. The resulting impacts of the analysis are found in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Chapter 5: Goals and Strategies

While the Planning Committee's many comments on this chapter from last summer have been incorporated, there are several additional topics to address.

1. Page 5-6 presents the Policy Committee's strategy "tiers"...not here for content debate!
2. Page 5-9 presents Strategy 110 – a consolidation of Strategies 8A and 100.
3. Pages 5-11 and 5-12 require action regarding Strategies 107 and 102. They pertain to the Gorham bypass and the "east-wets toll road".
4. Pages 5-12 to 5-15 reflect the Committee's April actions regarding interstate highway recommendations. The members should review the wording. Figures 5-1 and 5-2 need review.