

PACTS

Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System

Planning Committee Meeting Notice

Thursday February 3rd, 2011 - 9:00 a.m – 11:00 a.m.
PACTS/GPCOG,
68 Marginal Way, Portland

Agenda

1. Call to order
2. Minutes of the November 4th, 2010 Planning Committee meeting
3. Changes in Augusta at DOT; and an upcoming Transportation bill
4. Transit Focused Region Initiative: March 24& 25th Workshop

Invitee list ideas and refinement

5. New Study Proposals due this Friday February 4th
6. Updates from other committees
7. Public Comments
8. Next Meeting Date March 9th 8:30 am JOINT with Transit.
9. Adjourn

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Agenda Item 2. Minutes of November 4th, 2010 Committee Meeting:
PACTS Planning Committee Meeting
November 4, 2010
9:00 A.M.

Members: Amanda Stearns (Falmouth), Steve Linnell (GPCOG), Molly Just (Westbrook), Brooks More (Windham), Sara Devlin (MTA), Tex Haeuser (South Portland), Dan Bacon (Scarborough), Robert Kahn (Trainriders Northeast), Alex Jaegerman (Portland), Tom Poirier (Gorham), Nate Moulton (DOT), Patricia Quinn (NNEPRA), Peter Morelli (Saco), Carla Nixon (Cumberland), Elizabeth Trice (Cumberland County), Peggy Killmer (Yarmouth)

Staff/guests: Myranda McGowan (SMRPC), Caroline Paras (GPCOG), Lynne Powers (GPCOG), Carl Eppich (PACTS), John Duncan (PACTS), Rebeccah Schaffner-Tousignant (GPCOG), Paul Niehoff (PACTS), Lou Stack (Standish), Chris Small, George Flaherty

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 A.M.

2. Minutes of the September 30 meeting

Tex Haeuser moved to approve the minutes of the September 30, 2010 Planning Committee meeting, and Alex Jaegerman seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Mountain Division Rail Project (taken out of order)

Nate Moulton from the Department of Transportation discussed the Mountain Division Rail Project. Nate said that I the bond issue that passed on June 8, one of the projects within was \$4 million to begin work on rehabilitating the Mountain Division for future rail use. Forty miles of track were acquired in 1998 for future rail use under the Rail Preservation Act, and the DOT undertook an engineering study and a study of the economic potential of the line. DOT was also directed to investigate acquiring another five miles of track from Westbrook. The state now owns the corridor from Westbrook to Fryeburg, and has acquired a connectivity easement for freight and a passenger easement as well. If freight service can be started on this line, it will have the ability to connect with Pan Am and connect to the national rail system via Portland. The DOT's study showed good prospects for freight. It would cost an estimated \$20-\$22 million to rehabilitate the track to a class 2, which means maximum speeds of 25 mph for freight and 30 mph for passenger; to go up to a class 3, the current rails would need to be replaced, which would mean another \$20 million. They are building to class 2, but it could be adapted to class 3.

A portion of the last section that was bought had its track taken up by the railroad, which salvaged and sold the steel. The first thing to do is reconnect Portland to the rest of the line by laying brand new track. Some of the rail is already on the ground and construction is out to bid as of next week. Nate estimated that the entire track-less gap will not be filled, with the current amount of funding available; he thought that the new track would probably make it to Mollison Falls or behind the Windham jail. Future funding is very competitive. The focus right now is freight operation, as more money would be needed for passenger rail (platforms, stations, equipment, and operational subsidies). The goal is

to fix the line and put it out to RFP for an operator, and then require that the operator maintains it.

In answering questions from the committee, Nate said that the state currently owns 320 miles of track; by early next year, it will be 600 miles. There is a \$10 million Tiger grant for the Aroostook line, so thankfully, north and south funds shouldn't bleed each other. Nate said that the bid is for rail work only, and rail corridors are the first priority. Where the right of way can accommodate it safely, dual use of the corridor will be support, but there will be locations – such as drop-aways and marshes – where the trail doesn't run right beside the track.

Molly Just said that Westbrook supports freight traffic in the area, and said that the environmental benefits of taking trucks off the road will be excellent, as will the economic development. She felt it was shortsided that the Mountain Division trail was not studied together with the rail line, and she asked if pedestrians, bicyclists, and snowmobilers will be able to use the corridor after construction starts. Nate said that once the line begins operation, activity would be confined to a trail (if a trail was constructed at that point). For safety reasons, under federal operating rules and state law, if you are not on a DOT-designated trail, you become a trespasser. If there is a point where there is a lag between operation beginning and the construction of a trail, Nate said that he would be willing to work with people, and he won't be asking local sheriffs to chase people off non-operational tracks. All-terrain vehicles are not permitted, though, as they destroy the shoulders.

Chris Small mentioned the paved trail between South Windham and Sebago Lake, asking if it's a viable place for rail and trail to coexist once the rail line is operational. Nate said that some adjustments to the trail would probably have to be made. Anything closer to the rail than 15 feet requires a six-foot fence. Chris also asked if the line will need new ties, and if a connection will be made to the national system via Conway Scenic. Nate said that the six or seven miles between Conway and Red Stone are owned by the state of New Hampshire and will need work, and that that is New Hampshire's responsibility. New ties will be needed; Nate said that, more than anything, the work being done is tie renewal, ballast, and surfacing, and that the rails and bridges are generally in decent condition as-is.

Lou Stack said that the Mountain Division rail is very important to Standish and other communities along the corridor, and that they see this as a relief to the traffic caused by trucks and as an excellent chance to bring excursion rail out to Fryeburg.

Downeaster Extension Project

Patricia Quinn of NNEPRA gave a presentation on the project that will extend the Downeaster to Brunswick. NNEPRA was awarded \$35 million in January 2010 to upgrade the line between Portland and Brunswick, and the state and the Department of Transportation is going to fund anything in excess of that \$35 million. They will be rehabilitating 30 miles of track between the Portland station and the Brunswick Main Street station. The majority of that will be basic track work, replacing virtually the entire

line. It will be continuously welded rail, rehabilitating to class 4, which allows speeds of up to 79 mph; they think that the train will be moving at about 70 mph. Ties need replacing, there is signal work to be done, and two passenger platforms will be built, one in Brunswick and one in Freeport.

NNEPRA has been working closely with Pan Am and Amtrak. The first shipment of rail arrived on August 2 and Pan Am began installing it on August 16. At this point, 17-18 miles of rail have been replaced. Last week, the last shipment of rail made its way through Portland, and the railroad will work until the ground freezes enough that work has to stop. In the spring, workers will finish laying the rail, and 33,000 ties will be replaced. There will be ballast, signal work, and grade crossings will be started; the grade crossings will be smoother to drive over and safer. Everything will be updated with automated signaling systems, gates, and larger lights.

Of the \$35 million grant, NNEPRA has obligated (meaning there is a purchase order or a contract) \$27 million, and has spent close to \$10 million. Bids opened yesterday on automated signals and most other aspects are already out to bid. NNEPRA hopes to be running Amtrak trains in fall 2012. The project is well under way and is running smoothly and on-budget. Last week, it was announced that NNEPRA applied for a planning grant. They want to study ways to reduce travel time between Portland and Boston, and would like to bring it closer to two hours and 10 minutes, in order to be more competitive with drive time. Right now, speed is limited by the capacity of the track; there are five trains a day with large gaps in the schedule. They have been awarded \$600,000 in planning funds and NNEPRA provided \$150,000; they will look at potential track capacity for number of trains per day, and at the location of the Portland Transportation Center. With the train station in its current location, in order to go up to Brunswick, the train has to back up for a mile and then switch tracks before it can go. That maneuver makes up 7-10 minutes of the 50-55 minute estimated travel time between Portland and Brunswick. Patricia suggested checking out www.amtrakdowneaster.com, which has a section on the expansion that is updated every other week with milestones and pictures.

Gorham East-West

There was a discussion about a recent public Gorham East-West meeting, which was very positive. Sara Devlin had a recording of the meeting that she said that she would be happy to share with anyone who was interested. Tex suggested having the four municipalities show it on their public access TV stations. Committee members said that the biggest concern seemed to be density, with members of the public saying that they liked their bigger lots, and others doing a good job of explaining that if development keeps up with its current patterns, there won't be any large lots left.

3. Long Range Plan Update – Destination Tomorrow Implementation Priorities (taken out of order)

Carl Eppich discussed the work being done on the PACTS long range plan update, which is coming to a close. He said that it was organized primarily around policies, like economic development or the transportation land use connection. He told the committee

that he would like to hear how municipalities' projects could fit into regional needs and asked committee members to send him details on relevant projects; he is trying to make the long range plan update be about what PACTS and its communities can do. He pointed out that the projects will not be prioritized, and it will be clearly delineated that they are just examples. Their inclusion in the report will have no effect on funding. He would like to have lists of projects with regional significance from agencies as well.

5. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

6. Next meeting

The next meeting will be at 8:30 A.M. on December 9, 2010, in a joint effort with the Transit Committee.

7. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 A.M.

Agenda Item 3. Changes in Augusta at DOT; and an upcoming Transportation bill info sharing and discussion

Since our last meeting in November, much has happened:

Many of you may have heard that **David Bernhardt**, PE has been nominated by Governor LePage to be the DOT's next Commissioner. David is an engineer from Vassalboro who has worked for the Department for 26 years. He is currently the Director of Engineering and Operations the department that oversees and maintains Maine's highway, bridge, ferry and other public transportation systems.

Governor LePage said he wanted to hire a commissioner "who can take a nickel and stretch it into a dollar. The name that kept coming up is David Bernhardt." Bernhardt has consolidated transportation maintenance facilities and formed a partnership with New Hampshire to save on purchases such as road culverts, resulting in \$10 million in annual savings for Maine, LePage said. The emphasis on savings comes as the transportation budget falls hundreds of millions of dollars short of what's needed to keep up with proposed capital improvements for highways and bridges. Asked whether an increase in Maine's 29.5 cent-per-gallon gas tax plays into a solution to raising more revenue for the department, LePage said, "It doesn't."

That policy was seconded by Bernhardt, who said his "first job is to look for efficiencies and cost-effective solutions without having to raise the gas tax."

Also, in December we learned that **Kat Beaudoin**, Chief of Planning at DOT was resigning at the end of January. Peggy Duval who was Kat's deputy, is now the Acting Chief Planner.

Transportation Bill Update

Authorization, SAFETEA-LU

T-LU is extended through March 4th, per language in the continuing resolution. It's likely that another short term extension will be enacted. Most observers think it's unlikely a multi-year bill will pass until after the Presidential election. Both the House and Senate have started conducting hearings on a new authorization bill.

Over a year ago, the current transportation authorization bill, known as SAFETEA-LU for expired. This was a \$286 billion comprehensive transportation funding authorization for 2005-2009. A much more ambitious bill was developed over the past two-years (around \$500 billion) but with the New Congress, such ambition is surely gone.

The House GOP adopted a new legislative rule that will [allow the House to allocate less transportation funding](#) than is authorized by SAFETEA-LU. The Senate is not likely to follow suit, setting up a contentious negotiation on the FY 2012 appropriations bills later this year.

The House GOP adopted a rule last night that will allow the House to allocate less transportation funding than is authorized by SAFETEA-LU. The rules package will be voted on by the full House and is expected to pass.

The purpose of the rule is to "prevent the government from being forced to spend more on surface transportation projects than the Highway Trust Fund collects."

What does it mean for transportation stakeholders and agencies?

Almost certainly the FY 2012 transportation appropriations bill (Oct '11 - Sep '12) will provide less funding than the 2010 spending bill. The FY 2011 spending levels are yet to be finalized; the House and Senate headed to a big showdown over that, come February.

Pro-transportation Representatives will put up a good fight, and the Senate and White House will likely support higher funding levels, but ultimately it may not be enough. Look for 2012 transportation spending to be much, much closer to projected revenue than authorized spending levels. And transit and rail program funding may be more at risk. Much of the funding for those programs comes from the general fund.

Republicans have talked about returning to 2008 spending levels. That now may look more appealing to transportation stakeholders, off the top of my head I suspect that 2008 funding is probably higher than the current Highway Fund revenues.

Unfortunately it appears that the financial benefits of that spending (jobs preservation and creation, the manufacturing and purchasing of construction goods) played little or no role in the debate. Hopefully transportation stakeholders can make those arguments more forcefully in the coming months.

Amtrak:

“Republicans: Cut Nearly \$6 Billion Funding for Amtrak, & Transit. Now.”

An influential group of House Republicans is proposing to eliminate about \$1.6 billion a year in Amtrak grants, \$2 billion in New Starts grants, and \$2.5 billion in intercity and high-speed rail grants. The New Starts program funds commuter rail, light rail, heavy rail, bus rapid transit, streetcar, and ferry projects across the nation.

The group is the Republican Study Committee, and membership includes about two-thirds of House Republicans. The proposal is part of a larger plan to cut \$100 billion from non-defense discretionary spending in the current budget year. House Rules Committee Chairman David Dreier commented that "We want to just as quickly as possible begin this process of reducing the size and reach of government."

Will the proposal pass? What's it mean for transportation stakeholders?

The House Republican proposal can be considered as one end of the spectrum of proposals, and is unlikely to become law as drafted. The Senate and White House would certainly strongly

oppose cuts that deep.

But the proposal should not be dismissed. It will gain significant support in the House and some support within the Senate.

And even if the cuts were reduced by half, there still would be a significantly negative impact on current and future light rail and transit projects and in particular, the future of intercity passenger rail. Advocates better be dusting off their advocacy communications plans.

Sources and additional reading:

"Republicans Propose Spending Cuts Targeting Amtrak, Transit Funding," Streetsblog Capitol Hill
<http://dc.streetsblog.org/2011/01/21/republicans-propose-spending-cuts-targeting-amtrak-transit-funding/>

"Republican committee members propose to slash transit funding through spending cut bill," Progressive Railroading
<http://www.progressiverailroading.com/news/article/Republican-committee-members-propose-to-slash-transit-funding-through-spending-cut-bill--25554>

"Spending cuts would hit Amtrak, Metro" Washington Post
http://voices.washingtonpost.com/dr-gridlock/2011/01/spending_cuts_would_hit_amtrak.html

"Transportation bill could produce environmental and job benefits in 2010"
<http://www.grist.org/article/2010-01-07-transportation-bill-environment-green-jobs/>

"Smarter Planning and Increased Transit Makes Us Grow Wealthier"
<http://t4america.org/blog/2011/01/19/smarter-planning-and-increased-transit-makes-us-grow-wealthier/>

Agenda Item 4. Transit Focused Region Initiative: March 24 & 25th Workshop

On January 18th the initial meeting was held for this initiative. The “Study Team” for this initiative is comprised of planners -many of you-, transit providers, and a representative from the Maine Turnpike, and hopefully someone from the Maine DOT.

Dates for the two forums for elected officials and staff (open to the public) have been scheduled as follows:

March 24th 5-9 PM Westbrook Middle School
and the morning of March 25th from 8AM -12 PM

April 7th 5-9 PM Ocean Gortway in Portland
and the morning of April 8th from 8AM -12 PM

Conduct two half-day visioning workshops with PACTS, the Transit Committee, and other key regional stakeholders as identified by project Team, PACTS, and the Committee. The workshop will be facilitated by a team of at least four national transit experts. Workshop will include advanced preparation materials provided electronically, handouts, printed boards, Powerpoint presentations, and interactive discussion in a round-table or community forum format.

Workshop elements:

- Transit System 101 – overview of fundamentals of a successful transit system
- Land Use 101 – overview of fundamentals of transit-oriented development
- Estimation of transit-ready corridors & nodes in region, including potential for fixed guideway service
- Identification of transit-ready land use controls in region
- Development of a vision diagram
- Development of evaluation and ranking criteria

Final workshop products: Conceptual transit network; Evaluation criteria; Ranking factors

Review proposed list of attendees [for the workshops and suggest additions]
The is intended to be a informational and best practices for regional players.

Agenda Item 5. New Study Proposals due this Friday February 4th

There is still an opportunity to submit study proposals for consideration in the 2012-2013 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). Please see the attachment for further detail. This agenda item is an opportunity to discuss your proposals and to see if anyone is proposing similar studies/initiatives that could be submitted together.

Please take the following into consideration as you develop your proposals:

- We encourage you to focus on regionally significant study proposals – and to look for opportunities for multi-municipality topics. A good example would be a regional study proposal designed to move forward certain aspects of the recently completed Tri-Community Transportation Plan for Saco, Biddeford and Old Orchard Beach.
- We expect that there will be less money available in the next two years for your study proposals than there was in this biennium.
- We also encourage you to submit multiple study proposals despite the limited resources available because new opportunities to fund new studies might arise during the two year period.

The attachment includes the following:

- Schedule for the development of the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)
- Technical assistance for Phase II of the Gorham East West Corridor Study
- Synopsis of the UPWP
- Regional initiatives and studies
- PACTS staff work
- Proposal requirements and the process for choosing studies

We ask that representatives of Windham, South Portland, Gorham, Portland, Scarborough and Westbrook act on the Gorham East West Corridor Study section.

6. Updates from Other Committees

From Executive Committee:

This outline was developed for the Executive Committee, but is perhaps helpful for some of you less familiar with day-to-day work at PACTS.

Outline For PACTS Staff Work For The Coming Two Years:

Policy Development and Regional Coordination

1. Work with the members of our **5 standing committees** and with a **TIP Process Committee** in 2011. We also foresee continued quarterly joint sessions of our Planning, Technical and Transit Committees.
2. Continue a regional education and state-level collaboration processes related to **transportation needs** and funding options.
3. Monitor and advise our members on the development of and the implications of state and federal **legislation**, including the next federal transportation **authorization act**.
4. Lead the implementation of the recently adopted **PACTS region traffic management system policy** regarding traffic signals.
5. Continued close collaboration with (and development of relationships with new staff at) the **MaineDOT, the Turnpike Authority, SMRPC and GPCOG**.
6. Maintain the PACTS website and perform other **public outreach** work.

Project Programming and Development

1. Facilitate the **development of funded projects** in our region. This might include a greater PACTS role in **local project administration**.
2. **Monitor** changes in the scope and cost of funded projects, and then **administer** the amendment process as appropriate.
3. Work with our municipal members, MaineDOT and FHWA on opportunities **to streamline the development of projects and to reduce project costs**.
4. Perform the priority setting for the **2014/2015 PACTS MPO Allocation** list of projects.

Planning and Administration

1. Participate in the land-use-transit-highway planning in **Phase II of the Gorham East-West Corridor Study** led by the Turnpike Authority and MaineDOT, in the **Regional Sustainable Development Plan** led by GPCOG and SMRPC, and in the **Northern York County Corridor Study**.
2. Organize, administer and participate in PACTS-funded consultant **studies**. In early 2011 we have 12 studies in process with consultants, and we estimate that we will start 12 new ones in the next UPWP. This includes work with our PACTS model consultant team who will update the model with the new data from the 2010 U. S. Census.
3. Administer the 2012/2013 Unified **Planning** Work Program, and develop the next one in early 2013.

4. Work with our federal and state partner agencies to meet federal and state planning and programming **requirements**. This will include work related to our region's new air quality non-attainment status.

From the Transit Committee:

PACTS has received two proposals for the **Bus Priority Corridor Project** and is in the process of reviewing them. PACTS plans to interview firms on January 20 and make a decision that week.

The **Gorham East-West Corridor Phase I Study** is concluding. A proposed Phase II Transit Study is anticipated to take approximately 12 months. This Study (costing roughly \$250,000) would provide detailed analysis of transit alternatives to develop more precise ridership forecasts, costs and priority for implementation. The Phase I Study also recommends researching existing or new Transit Authorities (for \$25,000), and working with communities to identify Transit TIF Districts (\$50,000).

(The last meeting of the Technical Committee was held jointly with Planning 1/11/2010)

Agenda Item 7. Public Comments

This Agenda Item is reserved for any comments the public or anyone attending may wish to share with the committees.

Agenda Item 8. Next Meeting Date – JOINT WITH TRANSIT

- March 9th 8:30am