

PACTS Regional Transit Coordination Study Executive Summary



Prepared by:

**Greater Portland Council of Governments
Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission**

In Cooperation with:

PACTS Regional Transit Coordination Study Committee

Prepared for:

**Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee
PACTS Area Public Transportation Providers**

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Executive Summary

The PACTS *Regional Transit Coordination Study* was identified as one of the top recommendations in *Destination Tomorrow*, the Long Range Plan of the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee (PACTS). This report was prepared by staff from the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) and the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission (SMRPC) with assistance from Tom Crikelair and Associates and input from the Study Advisory Committee.

Strategy 34, also known as Transit Coordination states: “(C)ontinue the efforts of the PACTS Transit Committee and the Peninsula Transit Operations Group to coordinate transit service, fares and operations in the region. These efforts should include studying the feasibility of regionalizing the seven public transit service providers, potentially into a regional transit authority or other more cost-effective and streamlined structure.”

Responsible parties were identified as: Municipalities, PACTS, GPCOG, MaineDOT, SMRPC and Transit Agencies.

The overall goal of this study was “to identify opportunities to increase efficiency of transit operations within Greater Portland and to work toward the development of one regional transportation system.” To accomplish this, providers and staff assessed existing conditions and identified opportunities to realize cost efficiencies, improve quality and frequency of service, connectivity, and ridership for all providers with an emphasis on maintaining or improving customer service. **In concert with the operations and management orientation of this study the oversight committee recognizes that the ultimate goal for any transit system is to increase ridership.** All of the efforts and recommendations of the committee are focused on ways to make transit service attractive and useful to more people in the region as a primary travel option.

Goals and Objectives

The overarching goal is increased public benefit and relevance of public transit in the region.

Objectives

1. Better coordination between providers
2. Financial savings/better funding
3. Improve or expand services
4. Better connections and transfers
5. Consolidate planning and marketing
6. Better accountability
7. Better coordinated information to customer

Summary of Consolidation Examples from other areas of the U.S.

Staff researched areas which had a similar population and/or similar circumstances as the Greater Portland region. The following areas were reviewed in depth.

- Butte County – California
- Quad City area – Iowa and Illinois
- Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill – North Carolina
- Atlanta – Georgia

Staff also reviewed the following consolidation efforts that were either attempted, or are currently underway:

- Burlington , Vermont
- Hampton Roads Transit, Virginia
- Washington, D.C.
- Detroit, Michigan

Guiding Principles for Coordination and Consolidation Efforts

As a result of reviewing the efforts of other regions around the country, the Study Committee developed the following Guiding Principles for the Study. Any coordination efforts between two or more transit providers in the region will meet the following criteria:

1. The primary goal of any effort will be to improve the quality of transit service for customers
2. Realize cost savings by eliminating duplication and reducing administrative and/or operating expenses
3. Increase efficiency and quality of service operation and delivery
4. Provide a benefit to all participating providers and customers
5. Better coordinate planning and marketing
6. Coordinate the format and delivery of information to the customer
7. Provide better connections and transfers between services
8. Provide for a method of accountability and a measure of success

Key Findings

The following is a summary of findings from the work of Crikelair and Associates, who was asked to look at transfers from the perspective of the customer, and gather together some popular origins and destinations in the region. His work focuses on the three fixed route bus systems.

The transit program in the Greater Portland area has two significant regional strengths. First, there is a large quantity of available service, with substantial route coverage in the communities that are served. Second, the region’s three principal fixed-route bus programs accept transfers from connecting transit agencies.

However, despite free transfers, travelers often face significant scheduling barriers when they try to plan trips that involve more than one transit program. This evaluation has identified three issues that reveal weaknesses in existing service coordination.

1. Bus stop locations – Many transfers require passengers to walk between bus stops. Bus stop locations are sometimes not obvious to inexperienced bus riders. The problem stems in part from the large number of bus routes that converge on Monument Square in downtown Portland. METRO has developed a transit hub at the Elm Street Pulse, but this location is not large enough to accommodate all METRO routes, let alone buses operated by South Portland and ShuttleBus/ZOOM.
2. Connecting schedule times – Connection times throughout the region are complex and confusing. This is true for connections internal to the METRO and South Portland systems, as well as for transfers between transit agencies. This situation appears to have resulted from routes and schedules that have evolved over many years with marginal adjustments, resulting in complicated routes with awkward and inconsistent headways.
3. Limited traveler information – Maps and timetables published by individual transit systems include telephone numbers for other transit programs, but they offer no information about destinations served by these other providers. Regional transit information available on the Internet includes multiple agencies, but information is presented separately for individual programs, with no explanation of how to plan trips that involve more than one transit agency.

The Four “Cs” Approach

The model proposed for advancing regionalization among the providers of transit services in the PACTS region is the “Four Cs Approach”. The system, initially suggested through the research of Curtis Wood and Kurt Thurmaier¹ in their analysis of Interlocal Agreements in the metropolitan Kansas City region, comprises a multi-step process for building relationships and advancing shared interests. Described in the approach for PACTS Transit as the “Four C’s”, the PACTS Regional Transit Coordination Study team proposes a continuum of Communication, Coordination, Collaboration, and Consolidation to move the recommendations of the report forward.

Recommendations

Report recommendations are grouped in priority order within the following categories.

Planning:

- **Improve and expand transit service by coordinating regional planning activities.**

Operations:

- **Improve coordination, efficiency and service among existing transit providers by conducting a comprehensive analysis and possible redesign of local transit routes in the region.**
- **Control expenses and improve efficiency by exploring the coordination and/or consolidation of operational systems.**

¹ Thurmaier, Kurt and Curtis Wood. 2002. “Interlocal Agreements as Overlapping Social Networks: Picket-Fence Regionalism in Metropolitan Kansas City.” *Public Administration Review*, Volume 62:5, 585-598.

Marketing:

- Improve ridership, revenues and customer service by promoting a seamless, customer focused, service oriented transit system with coordinated marketing and promotional initiatives.

Capital Investment:

Increase ridership, revenues and customer service by making investments in facilities and infrastructure.

PACTS Transit Consolidation Study - Prioritized Recommendations					
Category	Priority	ID #	Recommendation	Total Votes	Start
Marketing	1	2	Regional Map and Timetable	9	Underway
		1	Marketing staff, collective advertising opportunities	3	
Operations	2	4	Regional Route Study	6	Summer 2007
		4.1	Examine design, schedule & efficiency of routes	3	
		4.2	Identify new transit hubs	0	
		4.3	Timed Schedule with common denominator	0	
		4.4	Timed transfers	2	
		4.5	Expand Bus service to Park & Ride lots	0	
		4.6	Improve transit to underserved locations	5	
Planning	3	3	Improve intermodal connections	1	Fall 2007
		5	Expand present network	5	
Marketing	3	4	Incorporate transit planning in comp plan process	4	Fall 2007
		4.1	Include transit in major land use development	4	
		4.2	Explore Impact Fees for Transit	2	
Marketing	4	5	Promote transit incentives w/ major employers	4	
Marketing	4	7	Develop regional pass system	3	Fall 2007
		1	Transit Committee, coordination on agenda each mtg.		
		2	Annual meeting of all transit boards	1	
Planning		3	Better coordination ridership and other data	1	Underway
		1	Combine major employee training	4	
Operations		2	Maintenance staff, feasibility of shared facility	1	
		5	Take advantage of Safety and Security Funding	2	
Marketing	All Other	3	Explore common branding	0	
		4	Regional information website	2	
		6	Develop common survey instrument	1	
Capital		1	Explore cooperative purchasing	3	Underway
		2	Collectively work w/ MDOT on capital purchases	1	
		3	Improve & expand Downtown Transportation Center	0	
		4	Create new transfer points, mini-hubs	1	
		5	Improve and increase shelters and amenities	2	
		6	Explore shared maintenance facilities	2	

Implementation & Oversight

Designate PACTS Transit Committee as the lead agency to facilitate improved communication, coordination, collaboration among transit providers, communities and planning agencies, with staff support provided by PACTS.

- Establish and staff yearly meetings of all transit boards to discuss common themes and projects.
- Establish working groups and staff regular meetings between appropriate representatives of each transit provider to discuss coordination of Operations, Marketing, Finance, Planning and Administration strategies as outlined. Develop action plans to complete tasks and achieve objectives outlined in the objectives.
- Report on progress and action of each coordination effort at PACTS Transit Committee meetings.

Recommendations

Planning:

- **Improve and expand transit service by coordinating regional planning activities.**

- 1. The PACTS Transit Committee should incorporate an agenda item to discuss coordination at each meeting.**

PTC to incorporate immediately, providing a basic working model at the management level of how Communication fosters Coordination which in turn enables Collaboration and moves all involved towards Consolidation. (Fall 06)

- 2. All of the transit boards should meet collectively at least once a year, where common themes and projects could be discussed**

PTC Staff to coordinate with providers for first meeting in spring of 2007. This will demonstrate the 4C's at the board level, allowing members to be more involved with the process of moving along the continuum. (Spring 07)

- 3. Providers should gather on/off data on a regular basis, and coordinate efforts where feasible to assure effective comparison and analysis.**

Communication – PTC Staff to gather information about each provider's on/off collection practices. (Winter 06/07)

Coordination – PTC Staff to review current practices, review examples in other areas, and draft a program and methods for review. (Winter 06/07)

Collaboration – Conduct trial on/off counts region wide. Conduct follow-up analysis and review methods for possible improvement. (Spring 07)

Consolidation – Providers to provide funds for on/off surveys at specified intervals (i.e. every year, every other year, etc.) (Spring 09)

Third Priority – Recommendations 4, 4.1 and 4.2 under Planning and 5 under Marketing were combined and designated as the 3rd priority for implementation

4. The PACTS Transit Committee should work with PACTS staff and municipal officials to incorporate transit service planning into the municipal comprehensive planning process.

- 1. Involve the PACTS Transit Committee in the review of major land use development projects. Providers should have an opportunity to comment on design of and access to new facilities.*

Communication – PTC Staff to notify Transit Committee of all MaineDOT Scoping meetings in the region. Scoping meetings are required for larger developments that need to receive a Traffic Movement Permit from MaineDOT. All Regional Planning Agencies in Maine currently receive notices of these meetings. (Fall 07)

Coordination – PTC to appoint member to attend Scoping Meetings when and where appropriate, who would then report back to the PTC. PTC would then discuss the project and work with staff to develop recommendations to the MaineDOT Regional Engineer. (Fall 07)

Collaboration – PTC staff serve as providers' representative, to review developments and offer input for transit design, amenities, etc., and possibly fill other related planning needs. (Winter 07/08)

Consolidation – PTC and/or the PACTS Policy Committee to work with MaineDOT to amend the Traffic Movement Permit process to include formal public transportation representation and input. PTC Staff to work with individual municipalities to incorporate transit design in site plan review and other ordinance processes. (Spring 08)

- a. 2. Explore the possibility of Regional Impact Fees for Transit.*

Communication – PTC Staff to gather information regarding impact fees and other areas of the country where transit fees may be utilized, and share with PTC. (Spring 07)

Coordination – PTC to develop model impact fee ordinance and take necessary steps to forward idea through the PACTS and municipal public processes. (Summer 07)

Collaboration – PTC to utilize previous work to approach municipalities for possible inclusion of transit impact fees for new development. (Fall 07)

Consolidation – PTC to work with PACTS in deciding how new funds should be distributed between transit projects and/or providers. (Winter/Spring 08)

Second Priority – Recommendation 5 under Planning and 3 through 4.7 under Operations were combined and designated as the 2nd highest priority for implementation.

5. Work with surrounding communities to expand transit service beyond the present route network.

Communication – Continue sharing information regarding any route expansions or changes as part of the current PTC process. (Spring 07)

Coordination – Utilize information for future route planning activities that take into account system-to-system transfers, common fare structures where appropriate, etc. (Summer/Fall 07)

Collaboration – Establish common goals and parameters among providers for expansion of services. Establish uniform municipal contributions required for local match. (Fall 07)

Consolidation – PTC or some other entity to review, approve, and monitor any proposed route extensions. (Spring/Summer 08)

Operations:

- **Improve coordination, efficiency and service among existing transit providers by conducting a comprehensive analysis and possible redesign of local transit routes in the region.**
- **Control expenses and improve efficiency by exploring the coordination and/or consolidation of operational systems.**

1. **Transit managers or designees should meet to discuss possibilities of combining major employee training items** (such as driver training and safety).

Communication – Gather information on current training activities for each provider. (Summer 07)

Coordination – Transit providers' staff to meet to discuss common needs for employee training and map out major efforts. (Fall 07)

Collaboration – Transit providers conduct regional training events/workshops for employees. (Spring 08)

Consolidation – Providers consider hiring training coordinator with pooled funds. This staff person may also be able to coordinate other items, such as the drug testing processes, if needed. (Fall 08)

2. **Key maintenance staff for each provider should meet on a regular basis.** One of the first tasks of the group should be a discussion of the pros and cons of establishing a shared maintenance facility, referred to in #5 under Capital Investment.

PTC Staff to coordinate with providers for first meeting in Spring of 2007. Establishes the 4C's process at the staff level. (Spring 07)

Second Priority – Recommendation 5 under Planning and 3 through 4.7 under Operations were combined and designated as the 2nd highest priority for implementation.

3. **Improve schedule coordination and identify connections between all regional bus providers, ferries and rail terminals.**

Communication – Gather information on current transfer opportunities for each provider (completed as part of Transit Coordination Study)

Coordination – PTC and Staff to review current recommendations and set implementation schedule. (Summer 07)

Collaboration – PTC Staff to work with providers to better depict current transfer opportunities, and identify better connections between services. (Fall 07)

Consolidation – PTC or Staff to review any future schedule changes and make recommendations on how proposed changes could affect transfers and transfer locations. (Spring 08)

4. Conduct a comprehensive analysis and possible redesign of local transit routes in the region.

This includes buses operated by South Portland, METRO and BSOOB including coordination with other systems. The analysis should include but not be limited to the following:

1. Examine design, schedule & efficiency of routes.
2. Locate new transit hubs to allow services to be redesigned so that fewer routes can offer more efficient, more frequent, and more consistent service to downtown centers.
3. Design routes to fit within regular schedule windows of 15, 30, and 60 minutes.
4. Ensure routes are coordinated so that transfers at hubs are timed, consistent, easy to understand, and reliable.
5. Promote the use of Park & Ride lots by providing bus service for commuters.
6. Identify underserved locations that would benefit from improved intermodal connections including Amtrak stations, Casco Bay Ferry and Ocean Gateway Terminals.
7. Coordinate bus services between major origins and destinations such as the Maine Mall and Downtown Portland.

Communication – Gather information on overall system characteristics (completed as part of Transit Coordination Study) and plans for change in the near future

Coordination – PTC and Staff to review current system and recommendations for improvement, make sure they address the objectives effectively and set implementation schedule. (Summer 07)

Collaboration – PTC Staff to work with providers to better depict current system, and identify better utilization and connections between services. (Fall 07)

Consolidation – PTC or Staff to review any future schedule changes and make recommendations on how proposed changes could affect level of service, frequency, transfers and transfer locations. (Spring 08)

5. Operators should work together to take advantage of Safety and Security funding for transit.

Communication – Gather information and monitor policy. Put on agenda as needed. (Spring 07)

Coordination – PTC and Staff to review current policies and practices and identify unmet needs. (Summer 07)

Collaboration – PTC to implement best practices within and among the operations. (Fall 07)

Consolidation – Apply for funding to benefit two or more services. One entity provide TWIC and coordinate screening (Winter 07/08)

Marketing:

- **Improve ridership, revenues and customer service by promoting a seamless, customer focused, service oriented transit system with coordinated marketing and promotional initiatives.**

First Priority – Recommendation 1 and 2 under Marketing were combined and designated as the highest priority for implementation. This effort is already underway.

1. **Marketing staff or other transit employees should meet on a regular basis** to discuss collective advertising opportunities and common events.

PTC Staff to coordinate with providers for first meeting in Spring of 2007. Establishes the continuum at the marketing level. (Spring 07)

2. Prepare a joint publication that presents a regional map and timetables for multi-agency travel. Customers and visitors need to know all their options for traveling in the region.

Communication – PTC Staff to review current regional publications and information sources for best options on development of multi-agency publication. Staff to present findings to PTC and providers. (Summer 07)

Coordination – Transit providers work with existing marketing staff or outside consultant to develop regional publication. (Fall 07)

Collaboration – Transit providers and PTC approve publication and collectively fund printing and distribution costs. (Winter 07/08)

Consolidation – One entity serves as the outlet for the regional map and timetables, and also is responsible for conducting annual or more frequent updates. (Summer/Fall 08)

3. Explore opportunities for common branding. This would help customers identify transit options and may include coordination of advertising and other marketing strategies.

Communication – PTC Staff to coordinate and facilitate meetings with providers to discuss common branding ideas and opportunities. (Fall 07)

Coordination – Transit providers work to develop a common logo, map items, and other products – possibly hiring a marketing firm to assist in design. (Winter 07/08)

Collaboration – Transit providers establish timeframe for rolling out new materials and pool funding to assist in printing and distribution costs. (Spring 08)

Consolidation – PTC endorses new brand identity, logo, etc and providers incorporate into advertising and other agency materials. (This could happen under Coordination or Collaboration) (Summer 08)

4. Design Portland's Transportation Information Display System (TIDS) Web Site www.transportme.org to include multi-agency travel opportunities, instead of just presenting separate web pages for individual agencies.

PTC Staff to coordinate with GPCOG, MaineDOT and providers to make necessary changes to the web site as soon as possible. This will continue to be an iterative process.

Third Priority – Recommendations 4, 4.1 and 4.2 under Planning and 5 under Marketing were combined and designated as the 3rd priority for implementation

5. Providers should work together and with GO Maine to promote transit incentives with major employers in the region. Examples include *Commute Another Way Week*, promoting park and ride opportunities and Human Resources Conferences.

Communication – Staff from GO Maine program to make a presentation to the PTC. PTC Staff to research other business/employer outreach programs around the country. (Spring 07)

Coordination – PTC Staff to work with providers to assess current outreach programs to area businesses, or any current agreements with businesses. (Summer 07)

Collaboration – Transit providers work to develop opportunities where collaborative efforts in reaching out to businesses may apply. (Fall/Winter 07)

Consolidation – Employer outreach program formalized and funded in an equitable fashion among appropriate providers, or with other funding sources. (Spring/Summer 08)

6. Develop a common survey instrument that could be used across the board to measure customer satisfaction.

Communication – PTC Staff to gather current survey methods used by each transit provider and produce a summary for review. (Fall 07)

Coordination – Transit providers work to develop a common survey, although there will be differences based on service provided, and agree on methods. (Winter/Spring 08)

Collaboration – Transit providers follow through with common survey instrument, with assistance from PTC Staff. (Spring 08)

Consolidation – Providers to consider collectively pooling funds for survey activities and other customer service items. Results reviewed by the PTC, and recommendations developed to address common themes. (Fall/Winter 08)

Fourth Priority – Recommendation 7 under Marketing was designated as the 4th highest priority for implementation.

7. Develop a regional pass system, allowing riders to more easily use more than one service. This could also be implemented as part of an electronic payment pilot program with ITS funds in cooperation with MaineDOT.

Communication – PTC Staff to gather current methods of fare collection and multi-ride passes used by each transit provider and produce a summary for review. (Fall/Winter 07)

Coordination – Transit providers work to identify opportunities where a shared fare system might be implemented. PTC and Staff to work on developing cost sharing and other arrangements for future regional fare card. (Spring 08)

Collaboration – Providers work with PTC Staff to develop lower-cost fare card (non-electronic or with low-cost bar code readers), or apply for ITS funds for pilot program with a smaller number of providers. (Summer/Fall 08)

Consolidation – PTC and Staff work toward the implementation of an electronic fare collection system and system-wide fare card. (Spring 09)

Capital Investment:

- **Increase ridership, revenues and customer service by making investments in facilities and infrastructure.**

1. Explore opportunities for cooperative purchasing on items such as diesel fuel, ITS infrastructure, communication systems, shelters and tires.

Communication – PTC Staff to gather information on current purchasing methods for several items (some of this has already been completed as part of the Study).

Coordination – Transit providers’ staff to meet to discuss cooperative purchasing opportunities and develop action plan. (Spring 07)

Collaboration – PTC Staff to research opportunities and report back to providers. (Summer 07)

Consolidation – Providers work with GPCOG and SMRPC to incorporate items/purchases into existing cooperative purchasing program. Information provided on annual costs savings for the region and for each provider. (Fall/Winter 07)

2. Providers should work collectively with MaineDOT to increase efficiencies in the purchase of equipment and other large capital items.

Communication – PTC Staff to work with MaineDOT to review current purchasing practices and procedures and present findings to the PTC. (Summer 07)

Coordination – PTC or subcommittee to work with MaineDOT to identify opportunities to increase efficiencies and lower costs if possible. (Fall 07)

Collaboration – MaineDOT and providers work to implement strategies identified. Providers collectively fund inspector to monitor new vehicle production at the factory to minimize long term maintenance costs. (Spring 08)

Consolidation – ??? By this time (2013) PACTS area will be its own TMA. Will MaineDOT still be involved with purchases? (Summer/Fall 08)

3. Complete improvements and expansion of the Downtown Transit Center. Improvements to this facility may include a better bus queuing area, a coffee shop or “transit store,” electronic payment system, TIDS screens, and brochure distribution of other transportation services.

METRO proceeding with current plans for improvements to the Downtown Transit Center within available funding. PTC needs to explore ways to optimize its use as a transit hub for all the bus operators with stops on the peninsula. (Winter 06/07)

4. Improve and increase the number of bus stop shelters and amenities.

Communication – PTC Staff to gather information on current shelter locations or other amenities at stops for each transit provider. Staff to present information to PTC in map (GIS) format, and also provide information to providers. (Fall 07)

Coordination – PTC or subcommittee to work on identifying and prioritizing key locations where additional improvements are needed. (Winter/Spring 08)

Collaboration – Providers work through an agreement to fund needed improvements, and work with municipalities on possible maintenance agreements for shelter areas. (Spring/Summer 08)

Consolidation – One entity responsible for installing, maintaining, and funding bus stop amenities. System-wide capital improvement fund established for this purpose. (Winter 08/09)

5. Explore options for shared maintenance facilities. Shuttlebus provides maintenance for the YCCAC fleet and other municipal vehicles. METRO provides maintenance for some RTP vehicles. SPBS and Shuttlebus are in need of improved garage facilities. METRO and RTP need a larger maintenance facility. The Cities of Portland, South Portland and Westbrook are exploring opportunities to collaborate in the construction of bus/truck maintenance facilities. This may have implications for RTP, METRO and SPBS. Currently discussions have started with Police, Fire, Public Works and School Bus maintenance systems and facilities.

Communication – Maintenance staff to meet (referred to under #2 in Operations) (Spring 07)

Coordination – Providers develop shared maintenance plan with short, medium, and long-term opportunities. (Summer/Fall 07)

Collaboration – Providers implement short and medium-term recommendations from Maintenance subcommittee. (Winter/Spring 08)

Consolidation – If warranted, expand existing or construct new regional maintenance facility for 2 or more providers. (2009/2010)

- 6. Investigate creation of “transport centers,”² “transit stores,”³ or mini-hubs.** Mini-hubs recommended in 4.b. under Operations above should be built in cooperation with local businesses as transit-oriented development.

Communication – PTC to identify key locations where there is significant overlap or transfer opportunity that aligns with activity centers and/or areas that are specified as Transit Oriented Development. (Fall/Winter 07)

Coordination – Work with PTC staff and municipalities to quantify transit and bike/ped activity at these locations. (Spring/Summer 08)

Collaboration – Research funding opportunities and identify public and private sources. Locate properties that are centrally located to the TOD or activity hub that are conducive to multi-use development. (Fall/Winter 08)

Consolidation – Establish a network of TOD nodes throughout the region supported by local municipalities, businesses and development fees. (2009/2010)

² Recommendation from *Portland Transportation Plan*, 1993

³ “Transit Stores” are often set up in busy urban areas where patrons can purchase monthly passes & get schedules.

