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Improving Access to Transportation and Training

Report on progress pursuant to Resolve 2021, Chapter 92
A collaboration between the Departments of Labor,
Economic and Community Development, and Transportation

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*Submitted by
Maine Department of Labor*

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[Resolve 2021 Chapter 92](#) directed the Departments of Economic and Community Development, Labor, and Transportation to develop partnerships in order to improve access to training and transportation for workers. The Maine Departments of Economic & Community Development, Labor and Transportation are working collaboratively to address barriers related to transportation and training in a variety of ways, including the development of an information hub. The below provides a summary of ongoing efforts aimed at mitigating existing gaps in transportation access according to the primary charges of LD 1613—focusing on areas with limited public transportation, expanding access to young adults, and coordinating access to information on training and transportation resources.



Focus on areas with no viable public transportation

The Maine Department of Transportation programs and services enable engagement with a variety of stakeholders on workforce transportation. The Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan provides \$5 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to MaineDOT to support local, regional, and state workforce transportation pilot projects, especially in rural areas. This competitive grant program provides funds to support workforce transportation pilot projects around the state. Funds may be used for capital and operating costs, including program start-up costs, and should focus on addressing COVID-19's negative economic impacts on specific sectors of the economy. The program was launched in May 2022.

MaineDOT has awarded \$387,200 to Sunday River and is reviewing several other applications. While the primary focus is on connecting individuals with the appropriate skills and education to available job opportunities, the program can also support initiatives to connect individuals with training and education that lead to job opportunities and enable them to participate in today's economy.

The draft Maine State Transit Plan, recently made available for public comment, includes a focus on providing sufficient public transportation service in Maine's rural areas, which is difficult given our dispersed population and development patterns. A strategy of the plan is to explore, pilot and implement programs to address the needs of aging and working populations in rural Maine.

The Equity Subcommittee (ESC) of the Maine Climate Council recommended several actions designed to support the Climate Action Plan and increase access to affordable, efficient, clean transportation for all Maine people. The aforementioned MaineDOT initiatives are among those identified by the ESC to support the goal: "Expand access to affordable, efficient, and safe active, shared, and public transportation for LMI people, non-drivers, and other disadvantaged populations, particularly in rural areas". Additional supporting MaineDOT initiatives include e-bike bikeshare programs, transit electrification studies, updating the State's transportation plans, and programs to improve infrastructure for shared and active transportation.

2 Consider creating a fund for young people in job training programs, including technical education at secondary schools, for driver education, with participation based upon a means test and including youth in foster care

The Maine Career Exploration program, an initiative led by DECD, has also been exploring transportation supports for young adults participating in paid work experiences. For example, one of the Career Exploration Program grantees, successfully piloted a fully funded driver's ed cohort for eleven young adults in Lewiston. Through this grant program, students were able to participate in driver's education course at no cost as well as receive support for driving hours. This approach of funding driver's ed courses and driving hours is a model that other Maine Career Exploration grantees are learning from and considering how they can scale in their regions to meet local needs. Career Exploration also has support funds for transportation, and we are actively working with programs to address transportation needs per program.

Additionally, the Maine Department of Labor is supporting young people involved in various training and employment programs with transportation needs through a variety of programs. For example, the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan invested \$12 M in the expansion and creation of new pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. Fourteen organizations received grants to develop apprenticeship programs across the state—including in the more rural counties of Franklin, Somerset, Hancock, Washington, and Sagadahoc counties. The programs intend to create more than 3,000 apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship opportunities in the coming years—with an explicit focus on engaging young adults. Grantees are allotted funding to address individual barriers to program participation—including transportation—which are evaluated through a needs-based assessment.

The Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP) administered through the Maine Department of Labor additionally supports wraparound needs for eligible individuals pursuing training and education to obtain an industry recognized credential, an associate or a bachelor's degree required to enter into identified high wage/in demand occupations. Eligible individuals enrolled in the CSSP program participating in education or relevant training are supported with tuition assistance as well as provided with a case manager to help meet supportive service needs such as childcare and transportation. Support for mileage reimbursement, public transportation costs, and car repairs is available to ensure transportation does not provide a barrier to the students' successful attainment of their degree or credential.

Additionally, MDOL is supporting transportation needs of young adults eligible for and participating in workforce training and employment programs supported through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA is the public workforce development system's "backbone" legislation, setting the stage for employment and training programs and partnerships between the Department, the State Workforce Board, the Local Workforce Boards (administrators of the above employment and training program grants), the Community Colleges, and Adult Education, among others. Transportation supports for young adults in these programs can include assistance with driver's education classes, driver's license fees, public transportation costs, gas cards, and mileage reimbursement.

Coordinate with businesses, unions, educational programs and institutions, training programs, employers and community organizations to improve dissemination of information about available job opportunities and resources for training and transportation.

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The Office of Business Development (OBD) within the Department of Economic and Community Development provides resource navigation of programs and services to help start, grow or move businesses to Maine. The OBD team helps businesses identify resources and support available from the State and other external resources. With increasing feedback from businesses about workforce needs, OBD developed a comprehensive checklist of Maine resources from the Maine Department of Labor, Maine Community College System, workforce development boards, CTE schools, and worker recruitment nonprofits like Boots 2 Roots and Live + Work in Maine. Resources cover workforce training and recruitment opportunities customized to a business or county level. The OBD team engages with events and organizations undertaking workforce issues including local chambers of commerce and industry associations.

The Office of Business Development meets with businesses around the State to learn more about their opportunities and challenges. Then we pull together lists of resources to help the business, and these resources are often workforce resources, as described above. In some cases, we match employers with the relevant program contacts, such as personnel from Maine DOL.

MaineDOT administers the GO MAINE ridesharing and trip planning program in partnership with the Maine Turnpike Authority. The program continued but was not actively promoted through the pandemic. The program was re-launched in spring 2022, with consultant AECOM now managing the program on behalf of MaineDOT and MTA. A key focus of the program is expanded engagement and programming with employers throughout the state.

The Workforce Transportation Pilot and GO MAINE provide an opportunity for MaineDOT to engage with employers, groups of employers, municipalities, regional planning organizations, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders to help address workforce transportation needs. MaineDOT, MTA, and consultant AECOM continue to explore options to enable the GO MAINE platform to serve as a hub for transportation options statewide.

The Maine Department of Labor is providing additional investments in training through a variety of Maine Jobs and Recovery Initiatives, partnerships, and expansion efforts. The Healthcare Training For ME, partnership among DOL, DHHS, DOE, Maine Community College System and University of Maine system developed a one-stop website with a consolidated training calendar and coordinated intake process to ensure individuals and employers can more easily access healthcare training opportunities across the state and unlock relevant funding opportunities to support this training. Additionally, MDOL is supporting the development of industry partnerships responsible for convening employer, education and other key partners to develop industry-specific solutions to address workforce challenges. Several grantees are focused on designing, launching and recruiting for training opportunities aligned with career pathways within their sector of focus, ranging from healthcare to forestry.

MDOL seeks to disseminate information to jobseekers and the employer community in a variety of ways. Through the hiring of additional outreach workers and navigators, CareerCenter staff and community partners are meeting individuals where they are to provide connection to job training, supportive services, and other needed resources. Navigators and outreach workers are connecting individuals with resources across settings—including in libraries, schools, shelters, correctional facilities, as well as virtually through resources such as weekly jobseeker newsletter, Live Chat, and Bendable's online training resource library.

In the coming months, the Maine Department of Labor will be developing a one-stop-shop portal for workforce resources in Maine. Resources will include job opportunities, education and training options, career counseling supports, as well as information about supportive service programs such as childcare, transportation, and housing supports. The goal is that individuals and businesses can more easily access and connect to the training resources, career opportunities, and needed supports to advance in their career and build their workforces. This effort, led by the State Workforce Board in partnership with several State of Maine agencies and public higher education partners, is under development with plans to launch in late 2023.