

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

The following document is provided by the
LAW AND LEGISLATIVE DIGITAL LIBRARY
at the Maine State Law and Legislative Reference Library
<http://legislature.maine.gov/lawlib>



Reproduced from electronic originals
(may include minor formatting differences from printed original)

PUBLIC TRANSIT ADVISORY COUNCIL

BIENNIAL REPORT TO GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE

February 2023

Submitted by



MaineDOT

I. STATUTORY REPORTING REQUIREMENT

Excerpt from PTAC Statute 23 MRSA 4209-A:

- 1. Report.** The council shall report on its deliberations and any recommendations by March 1st of each odd-numbered year to the Governor and the joint standing committees of the Legislature having jurisdiction over transportation matters and health and human services matters. The report must include:
 - A. An assessment of the level of public transportation services provided to the public;
 - B. Recommendations for the level of service that should be provided and an estimate of the cost of providing those services; and
 - C. A progress report on recommendations contained in the most recent statewide strategic transit plan for the department as well as the quinquennial local coordinated plan for regional transit under section 4209, subsection 2.

II. BACKGROUND

The Public Transit Advisory Council (council) is currently comprised of 27 members offering diverse perspectives on Maine’s urban and rural transit needs (see Appendix A). The council is charged with advising the Departments of Transportation, Labor, and Health and Human Services on matters related to public transportation. The council meets at least once per year and on an as-needed basis otherwise. The most recent meetings were held on August 16, 2022 and January 24, 2023. All meeting materials including minutes are available at www.maine.gov/mdot/transit/ptac.

The past two years have been very challenging for public transportation. The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally altered transportation needs and travel patterns, with lasting impacts. Maine transit ridership has rebounded but remains at 55 to 70 percent of pre-pandemic levels for many providers. Indications are that people who are currently using public transportation have limited transportation options and rely on public transit to meet most or all of their transportation needs. It remains to be seen if people with transportation options will return to public transit in large numbers.

The pandemic has also exacerbated workforce challenges across the state and across the economy. Supply chain shortages have made procurement of vehicles and parts challenging. Public transportation providers have struggled to find drivers, staff, and capital to maintain current levels of service, much less support service expansions.

III. ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

The draft Maine State Transit Plan was released for public comment, along with the other modal plans in MaineDOT’s Family of Plans, in December 2022. The draft plan includes an assessment of existing conditions which describes the current transportation network. The full draft report is available on the MaineDOT website at <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/27763afe326645c285cb1d726ee68cae>

Maine’s statewide public transportation network consists of 25 in-state providers and one New Hampshire-based agency providing some service in Maine. This includes urban fixed route bus, small urban and regional systems, regional transportation programs serving Maine’s eight transportation regions, ferry service, and intercity bus and rail service. In 2019, prior to the onset of the pandemic, Maine’s transit providers provided approximately 7.9 million trips, with 15,074 million vehicle miles traveled and 18 million vehicle revenue miles. Key partners include the Maine Department of Transportation’s MaineCare non-emergency transportation program, regional transportation provider

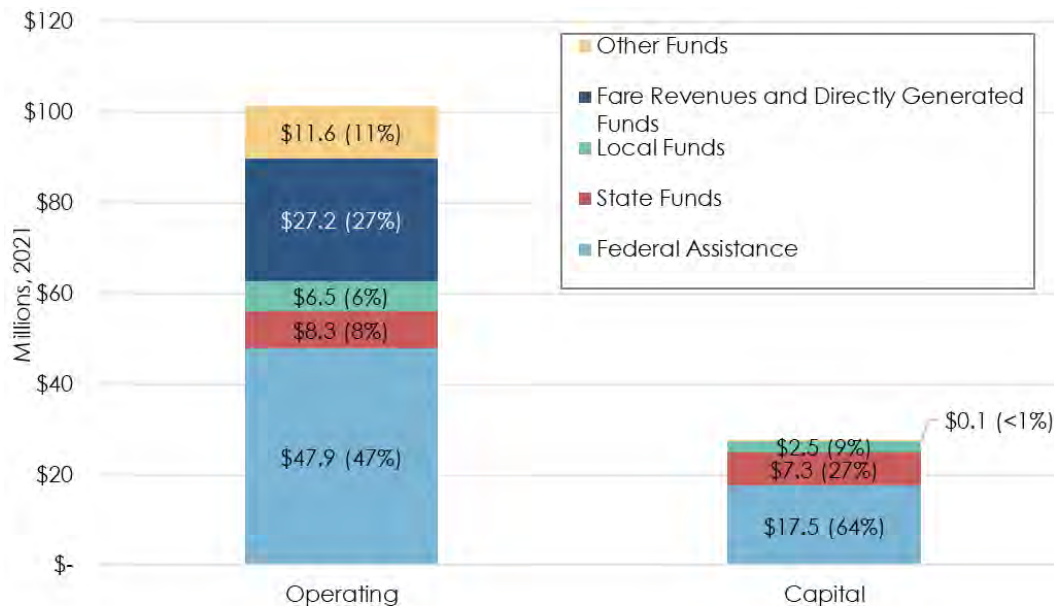
social service transportation, the GO MAINE ridesharing and trip planning program, volunteer driver networks, the Moving Maine Network, and workforce transportation initiatives such as MaineDOT’s Workforce Transportation Pilot initiative.

Most transit funding is administered through one or more Federal Transit Administration (FTA) programs:

- Section 5303 – Metropolitan Planning
- Section 5304 – Statewide Planning
- Section 5307 – Urbanized Area Formula Grants
- Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities
- Section 5311 – Nonurbanized Area Formula Grants for Rural Areas
- Section 5337 – State of Good Repair Grants
- Section 5339 – Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities

As shown below, federal assistance was the largest source of funds for both capital and operations in 2021, totaling \$65.7 million. These values may not be representative of available funding going forward, as several factors made 2021 unusual, such as the receipt of CARES and CRRSAA funding for transit operations. Expenditures in support of transit in 2021 total approximately \$20.6 million, including \$16.9 million for the Maine State Ferry Service, \$3.7M for transit (bus, small ferries, and the Amtrak Downeaster), and \$65.4 thousand for GO MAINE. With all sources of state funding included, Maine’s per capita state funding for transit was \$15.03 in 2021. Any snapshot of annual funding cannot consider the receipt of the emergency relief funding (i.e. CARES/CRRSAA/ARPA) passed through Congress for transit operations.

2021 Maine Transit Agency Expenditures by Source










The draft Maine State Transit Plan also includes 25 performance measures, based on 2021 data, across seven broad themes: usage, service level, efficiency, safety, state of good repair, sustainability, and use of technology.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS AND ESTIMATED COSTS FOR SERVICE THAT SHOULD BE PROVIDED

The 2019 Biennial Report discussed three approaches to assess unmet transportation needs in Maine: a summary, based on previous planning efforts, of identified groups having unmet transportation needs; unfunded applications requested from public transportation providers; and an estimate based on the number of households without a vehicle. The report cited the approach of the Maine Strategic Transit Plan 2025 (released in 2015), which adopted the Transit Cooperative Research Program’s approach that meeting 20% of total unmet needs in rural areas was a reasonable goal for public transportation service.

The draft Maine State Transit Plan’s Needs Assessment looks to the future of Maine’s public transportation network and is the basis for the PTAC’s recommendations for the appropriate level of service and associated costs. The Needs Assessment lists needs and shortcomings of the current statewide public transit system, including needs related to geography and environment, service structure, the COVID-19 pandemic, labor shortages and supply chain issues, funding, and technology.

| Theme | Specific Need | |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Rural Transit Demand and Accessibility | Effective quantification of demand Sufficient door-to-door service Sufficient multimodal connectivity and accessibility Effective targeted technology Appropriate marketing and communication Responsive service for the aging population |  |
| 2. Service Structure and Coordination Needs | Effective service frequencies and hours of service Effective coordination between transit agencies Sufficient geographic coverage |  |
| 3. Adjusting Service for Post-COVID Needs | Comprehensive assessment of post-COVID travel patterns and service needs, especially for particularly transit-dependent populations |  |
| 4. Driver, Labor, and Supply Chain Shortages | Address ongoing driver, labor, and supply chain issues |  |
| 5. Climate Change | Continued implementation of hybrid, electric, and other low- and zero-emission vehicles Robust public transportation system |  |
| 6. Additional Technology Needs | Full statewide implementation of GTFS and GTFS-Flex Implementation of CAD/AVL systems Scheduling software Modern fare payment systems Statewide asset management platform |  |

| | | |
|------------|--|---|
| 7. Funding | Sufficient public transit funding and predictability of funding levels |  |
|------------|--|---|

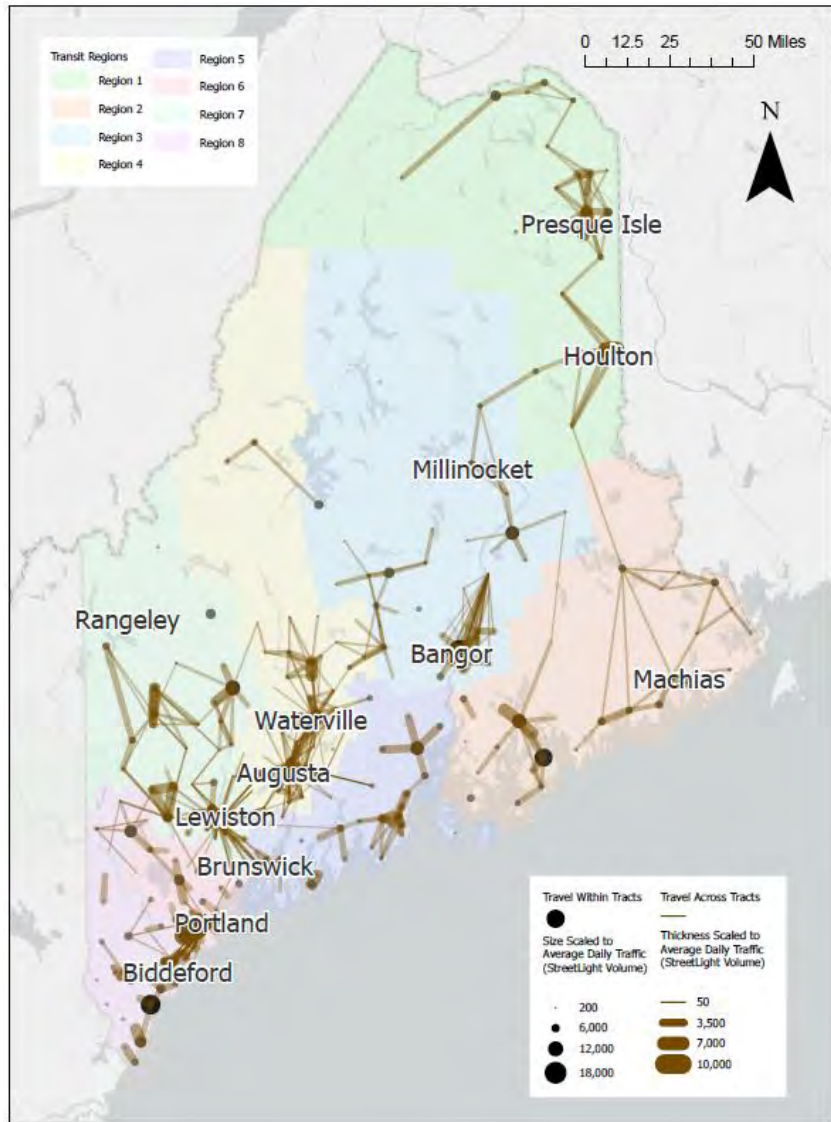
The Needs Assessment is based on an assessment of existing conditions, a public survey, public and stakeholder outreach, and an assessment of travel patterns based on an analysis of StreetLight location-based services data and demographics. The Needs Assessment is informed by an analysis of transit propensity around the state. The process, outlined below, identified geographies with high need for transit that do not have current transit service, based on origin-destination travel data from location-based services data. Data sources include StreetLight data, primarily from cell phones; the U.S. Census and American Community Survey; and ridership data from transit providers.



Travel patterns throughout the state were examined to identify areas of high transit propensity that are not currently served adequately by public transportation, based on an analysis of StreetLight location-based services data and demographics. Based on an analysis of a consensus of approaches, the transit propensity analysis included in the Needs Assessment incorporated eight key factors affecting transit ridership. While there is no single agreed upon standard for the relative importance of these factors, weights were selected based on a review of the literature, as detailed below.

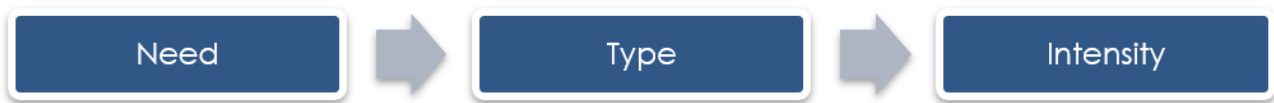
| Factor | Weight |
|--|--------|
| Population density | 30 |
| Quantity of travel | 20 |
| Zero-vehicle housing units (%) | 15 |
| Low-income households (%) | 10 |
| Population with disabilities (%) | 10 |
| Female population share (%) | 5 |
| Population that is not "white, non-Hispanic" (%) | 5 |
| Population aged 65+ (%) | 5 |

The overall statewide results are demonstrated in the map that follows.



A “rural” version of the score was also developed which excludes the population density component to better highlight the potential service needs of Maine’s lower-density areas. Analysis of Maine’s major metropolitan regions provides further detail on travel patterns and needs in those areas.

The Transit Plan also establishes a framework for determining the appropriate type and intensity of transit service to meet local needs and recommends an approach to quantifying demand and transit propensity. A progression builds from specific customer needs, using performance measures to identify appropriate types, intensity, and spans of service based on local conditions.



The table that follows outlines the wide range of transit service types and intensities in Maine, each with its own strengths and weaknesses to be weighed in determining appropriate service for each location and circumstance. Demand-response service does not scale up well, and scales down only moderately well, to meet changing demand. Fixed-route service scales up well as demand grows but may be difficult to scale down if demand declines, because hourly costs are essentially fixed. Although very cost-effective, vanpool and volunteer networks may not provide a sufficiently consistent level of service.

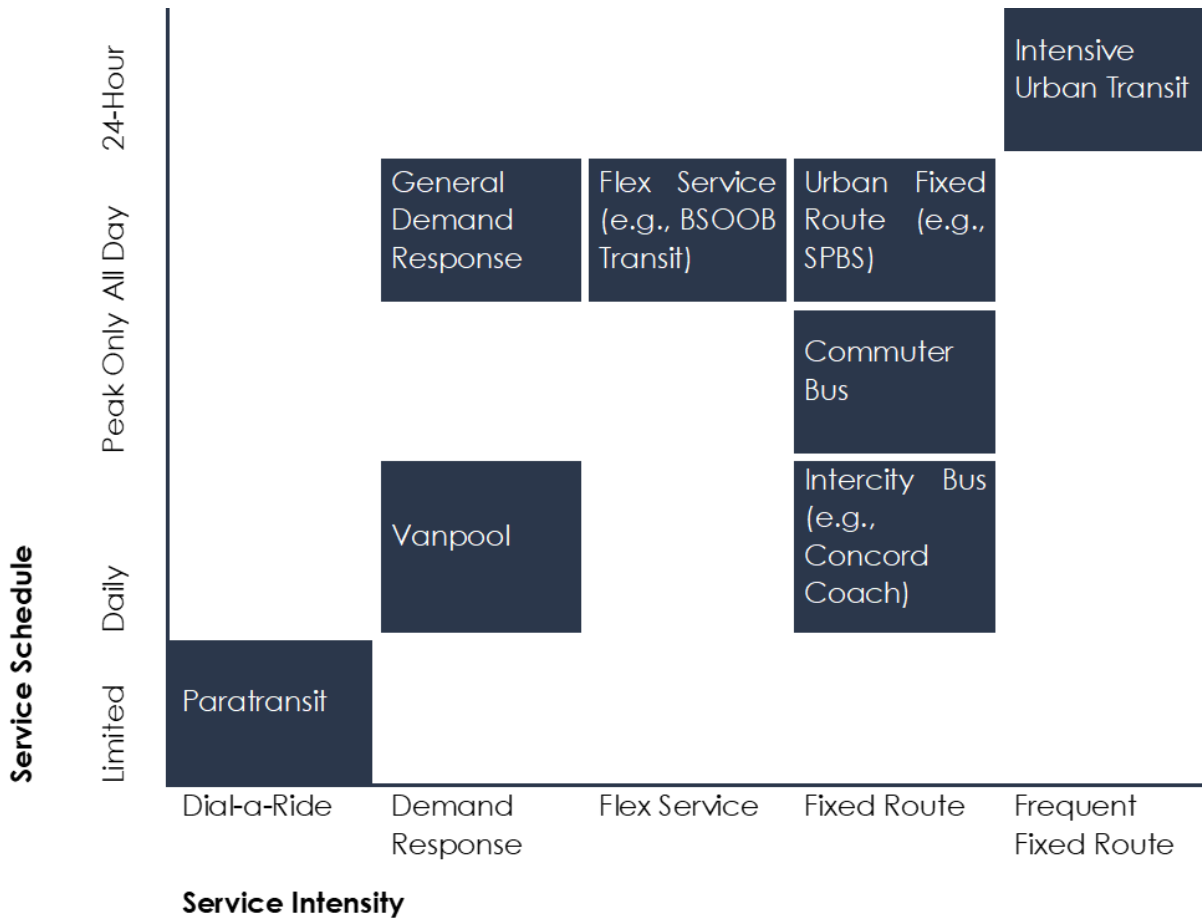
| Transit options | Description | Example |
|---|---|--|
| Volunteer Driver Networks | Paid or unpaid drivers from the community coordinated by agency or NGO. | Aging in Place, Friends in Action |
| Vanpool | Volunteer drivers use agency-provided vehicles to operate pooled service to common destinations (typically employers). | Commute with Enterprise/GO MAINE |
| Dial-a-ride | Prebooked service, typically 24 hours in advance and often limited to certain days of the week. | Penquis Community Action Program |
| Demand response (qualified and general) | Demand-response service (i.e. microtransit) using agency-operated or contracted vehicles with professional or contracted drivers. | Aroostook Regional Transportation System – Caribou |
| Limited/Intercity Service | Infrequent (no more than one run per day), often long-distance service. | Concord Coach, Cyr Bus Line |
| Deviated fixed route/Flex Service | Fixed route service that diverts from scheduled service to allow stops at nearby locations on passenger request. | Aroostook Regional Transportation System |
| Fixed route | Standard bus service, with scheduled stops at predetermined locations. | CityLink, South Portland Bus Service |
| Frequent fixed route | Bus service with headways of 15 minutes or fewer. | (Not present in Maine) |

The appropriate type of service depends on needs to be addressed, including:

- The pattern of trips to be served (such as trips to/from a few major destinations or several widely dispersed destinations)
- The intensity of the need (the number of trips that could be served)
- The transit propensity in the area served

The Transit Plan Needs Assessment notes that service spans and types can be combined into specific service options for a particular community or need, as shown in the framework that follows. Transit service in a community can be adjusted by moving service up or down (increasing or decreasing service span) and/or to the right or left (increasing or decreasing service intensity) on the axes.

Service Intensity and Schedule



Several different service options may be feasible for a given intensity of demand and transit propensity. Selecting the appropriate service for the situation depends on a local understanding of travel markets, including factors such as housing and land use patterns, community outreach, the dispersal pattern of trips to be served, and important destinations for transit users, including medical facilities, grocery stores, employment centers, recreation, and services. Given funding constraints, the relative costs, efficiencies, and benefits of the various service models must be considered as well.

Census-tract level analysis provides a high-level perspective, but local and regional assessments require a more detailed analysis. The weights and factors may be adjusted as appropriate, and the analysis can be improved at the local level through smaller geographic units such as Census block groups and analysis of time-of-day and day-of-week travel patterns.

Further details on this assessment of the level of public transportation services provided to the public and recommendations for the level of service that should be provided, and estimated costs are available in the Maine State Transit Plan and accompanying Needs Assessment, available at <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/27763afe326645c285cb1d726ee68cae>

V. RECOMMENDED PRIORITY STRATEGIES, ASSIGNED ACTION STEPS, AND STATUS UPDATE

This section provides a brief overview and update on some of the priority strategies and action steps from the PTAC's 2019 Biennial Report and the Maine Department of Transportation's Locally Coordinated Plan for Public Transit 2019 – 2023. MaineDOT is currently finalizing the draft Maine State Transit Plan which, when finalized, will provide the direction for Maine's public transportation system in the years to come and be the basis of future planning efforts.

Deepen State Agency Coordination (Lead = MaineDOT)

The Interagency Working Group on Transit meets on an as-needed basis to provide updates and coordinate on programming. In addition to the regular meetings, members connect regularly on issues of mutual interest. Members include MaineDOT, Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Maine Department of Labor, and the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. Meeting topics have included:

- MaineDOT Workforce Transportation Pilot
- Maine DOL's Barriers to Work survey
- E-bikes initiatives
- GO MAINE
- The Maine State Transit Plan
- Transit Bus Electrification
- Transit technology initiatives

As recommended in the Maine State Transit Plan, MaineDOT and DHHS intend to collaborate on efforts to improve coordination and efficiency between transportation services provided by the respective departments, an important example of interagency coordination.

Support Volunteer Driver Networks (Lead = MaineDOT)

The draft Maine State Transit Plan calls for strengthening and encouraging volunteer driver programs. The Maine Council on Aging's Transportation Equity for Healthy Aging initiative is gathering information on volunteer driver programs. The effort will develop volunteer training in an effort to bring volunteer driver programs and transit providers together to share information and resources. The initiative will also seek to work with regional transit providers and municipalities to develop pilot programs with volunteer drivers and with GO MAINE to include volunteer driver networks in the ride sharing program's trip-planning software. MaineDOT is actively participating in this initiative and will look to complement these efforts where appropriate and practicable.

Explore GO MAINE Trip Planner (Co-Leads = MaineDOT and Maine Turnpike Authority)

GO MAINE is a program of MaineDOT and the Maine Turnpike Authority, with MaineDOT having assumed the lead role in the fall of 2021. Consultant AECOM was brought on to conduct an evaluation of goals and objectives and to manage the program. The program functioned but was not actively promoted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and was relaunched in the spring of 2022. Agile Mile manages the GO MAINE trip planning software platform. Goals for this part of the program include:

- Incorporating General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) and GTFS Flex digital mapping of services and routes into the GO MAINE trip planner. MaineDOT is working with a consultant to assist transit providers in developing appropriate digital mapping of services and routes and ensuring that these systems are compatible across agencies. Agile Mile will work with the consultant and transit

agencies as necessary to ensure that these feeds are accessible in the GO MAINE trip planner.

- Incorporating automated fare payment systems into the GO MAINE trip planning platform. The consultant will also work with MaineDOT and transit agencies on procuring and implementing fare payment systems, and again will work with transit agencies, AECOM, MaineDOT, and Agile Mile to ensure that these are incorporated into the GO MAINE trip planner as appropriate. This may include single payment options across multiple providers.

Prudently invest in electric and hybrid propulsion systems and charging infrastructure (Lead = MaineDOT)

In 2022, MaineDOT worked with consultant Hatch LTK to develop plans for eight Maine transit providers (Bangor Community Connector, Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach Transit, CityLink, Downeast Transportation Inc., Greater Portland Transit District, Regional Transportation Program, South Portland Bus Service, and York County Community Action Corporation) to transition their vehicle fleets to hybrid and electric vehicles. The plans generally look to phase in hybrid and electric vehicles as existing vehicles reach the end of their useful life. MaineDOT is currently working with these agencies to ascertain needs for a potential joint application for funds through the Federal Transit Administration's Low or No Emission Grant Program, with applications due on April 13.

Launch Moving Maine Network (Co-Leads = Greater Portland Council of Governments, Maine Cancer Foundation, Maine Primary Care Association, MaineDOT)

According to its website, www.movingmaine.org, the Moving Maine Network convenes stakeholders from across sectors and perspectives to elevate solutions and champion policy actions. The Network has developed 2022-2023 Policy Priorities through input from hundreds of stakeholders representing various interests and lived experiences across the state. The Network has also developed a list of Core Values. Moving Maine's Policy and Advocacy Workgroup acts as the venue to collaborate and advance its policy efforts. The Networks goals are:

- Mainers can walk, bike, and roll safely
- Mainers can access rides to community, healthcare, and social needs
- Mainers are able to afford public transportation
- Mainers have access to public transportation

Moving Maine's Steering Committee includes Maine Housing, Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach Transit, Penquis Lynx, Maine Youth for Climate Justice, Portland Friends Meeting, Maine Statewide Independent Living Council, Maine Department of Labor, ITN, Maine Community Action Partnership, Maine Primary Care Association, Maine Council on Aging, MaineDOT, Greater Portland Council of Governments, Xenos Communications Consulting, Community Housing Maine, Maine Center for Disease Control, Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Disability Rights Maine, and mobility liaisons.

Increase State Funding to Transit Agencies (Lead = Legislature and MaineDOT)

MaineDOT has updated its reporting numbers to more accurately reflect total amounts provided to public transportation. Previous reporting which calculated Maine's state funding as \$0.86 per capita did not include funds for the Maine State Ferry Service, the Northern New England Passenger Authority/Amtrak Downeaster, and GO MAINE. With all sources of state funding included, Maine's per capita state funding was \$10.81 in 2020 and \$15.03 in 2021. The increase from 2020 to 2021 is largely due to increased state funding for the Maine State Ferry Service. State Departments of Transportation include different funding components in their numbers, and therefore comparisons across states are

challenging and should be used only cautiously. Average per capita state funding for the 50 states and the District of Columbia in 2020 was \$63.00, a number which is significantly increased by large amounts of state funding in several urbanized states and the District of Columbia.

Update Maine Transit Association Directory (Co-Leads = Maine Transit Association and MaineDOT)

The directory was completed in early 2020. The most recent version is available on the MaineDOT website at <https://exploremaine.org/bus/>

Appendix A

PUBLIC TRANSIT ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP February 2023

| Name | Affiliation | Term Expiration |
|---------------------|---|------------------------|
| Lori Brann | MaineDOT (Council Clerk) | unspecified |
| Ryan Neale | MaineDOT (Commissioner's Designee & Chair) | unspecified |
| Stephanie Carver | Kittery Area Comprehensive Transportation System | 12/31/2023 |
| Larry Allen | Androscoggin Transportation Resource Center | 12/31/2024 |
| Maddie Jensen | Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System | 12/31/2025 |
| Andrew Clark | Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System | 12/31/2023 |
| Jessica Maurer | Maine Council on Aging | 12/31/2024 |
| Tim Cowan | MaineHealth | 12/31/2025 |
| Levi Rogers | Jackson Laboratory | 12/31/2023 |
| Chris Hall | Maine Economic Development Directors Assoc. | 12/31/2024 |
| Kim Moody | Disability Rights Maine | 12/31/2025 |
| Michael Hallundbaek | Waldo Community Action Partners | 12/31/2023 |
| Paul Towle | Aroostook Partnership | 12/31/2024 |
| Clyde Barr | MaineHousing | 12/31/2025 |
| Dana Knapp | Concord Coach Lines | 12/31/2023 |
| Rep. Lynne Williams | Transportation Committee, Democratic Party | 12/7/2024 |
| Sen. Brad Farrin | Transportation Committee, Republican Party | 12/7/2024 |
| Will Gayle | Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority | 12/31/2024 |
| Susan Lessard | Town of Bucksport | 12/31/2025 |
| Greg Jordan | MTA/Greater Portland Transit District (METRO) | 12/31/2023 |
| David Landry | Penobscot Job Corps | 12/31/2024 |
| Katherine Freund | ITNAmerica | 12/31/2025 |
| Jonathan LaBonté | Lewiston and Auburn Railroad Company | 12/31/2023 |
| Rebecca Grover | Maine Turnpike Authority / GO Maine | 12/31/2025 |
| Wayne Morey | Maine VA Healthcare | 12/31/2023 |
| Sandy Buchanan | Western Maine Transportation Services | 12/31/2024 |
| Barbara Schneider | Citizen | 12/31/2023 |
| Duane Scott | Augusta Age-Friendly Advisory Committee | 12/31/2024 |