

CLIMATE ACTION TOOLKIT #4

Partnerships to Promote Active and Public Transit



PENOBSCOT
CLIMATE ACTION



MODERATE POTENTIAL
to achieve greenhouse gas
emissions reductions



HIGH POTENTIAL
to build community
resilience

Description of the Action

The primary action of this toolkit is to foster partnerships with local businesses and key community organizations around active and public transit. These partnerships can benefit the transportation system in the region by increasing funding for transit services through advertising and potential route sponsorships, sharing resources and information about transportation options to make them more easily accessible and increase ridership, and expanding the reach of public and active transit opportunities. This action can be implemented through some or all of the following components:

Transportation Hub Website - Create a single website that is a one-stop shop for all transportation-related information for the region. The site can house information and link to the Community Connector, regional bus systems, paratransit programs, rideshare and vanpooling options, information for walking and biking (e.g., maps of trail and bike networks, maps of bike parking), and transportation opportunities and incentive programs. Concentrating all of this information to be found on or linked to one website will make the information easier to find and navigate, removing barriers to ridership and community participation. While not directly a partnership with a business or organization, this is an important action to house information about the following partnership actions.

Employer-Sponsored Commuter Routes - Work with large employers in the region and the Chamber of Commerce to create new transit routes or extend existing

ones to be convenient for employee commutes. Employer sponsorship, or pay-in, can be a method of bringing revenue into the transit system in addition to increasing ridership among employees and others who may also use the route. This strategy can also apply to any larger apartment complexes in the region who may be interested in convenient transit as a selling-point for tenants, and to senior centers or living facilities that may want to establish or expand mobility options.

Vanpool/Vanshare Program - Establish a vanpool/vanshare program in areas that aren't served by existing bus routes. Residents can sign up and rent a van for a certain regular commute or other trip with a small group of people. This service can be available for a monthly fee split between all participating vanpool members, set based on duration and frequency. This is often much more affordable than each individual needing their own personal vehicle, reduces vehicles on the road, and is a source of income for the transit system. A vanpool/vanshare program can require less staffing than establishing regular routes to serve similar purposes, and can be a great option when there are staffing or funding challenges. This would be a good option to explore as part of a microtransit study.

Launch a campaign with GO MAINE - Collaborate with GO MAINE in order to expand its reach and benefits to the Bangor region. This collaboration could take many forms, but would focus on 1) increasing the number of local businesses participating in the GO MAINE rewards programs, and 2) increasing the number of people

(continued on page 2)

How This Action Supports the Goals of Penobscot Climate Action

- ★ **Equity and Environmental Justice.** A key aim of transit partnerships with businesses and organizations is to expand public and active transportation systems. Safe and reliable transit options make it more affordable to commute and reach community resources and necessities, and make these essential activities more accessible for individuals who can't afford or aren't able to drive a personal vehicle.
- ★ **Environmental Health.** More robust and successful public and active transportation systems reduce greenhouse gas and other emissions by reducing individual vehicle trips.
- ★ **Community Resilience.** Public transit provides reliable access to resources and services both regularly, and in emergencies. Additionally, when businesses and organizations are invested in and connected to transit systems, it makes for more reliable and varied sources of financial, social, and logistical support, providing stability and resilience for this essential resource.
- ★ **Regional Collaboration.** Many existing transit services like the Community Connector and BACTS are already regional. Enhancing these services and involving more stakeholders, businesses, and community organizations in the region fosters stronger ties and connections between all of these communities and makes travel among and between them more accessible.

Photo in upper left by Bicycle Coalition of Maine

(continued from page 1)

participating in the rideshare features to make ridesharing more feasible in the region. This campaign can reach out to local businesses about the free GO MAINE Lunch and Learn programs for employers. Employers may be interested, because participation in GO MAINE can help reduce parking needs, offer vanpool programs to assist with employee commutes, contribute to sustainability and emissions goals, and promote active transportation (linked to healthier, more productive employees). Additionally, there are participant rewards offered through GO MAINE and the WAY 2 GO MAINE bi-annual event.

Employer Transit Benefit Program - Collaborate with the Bangor Chamber of Commerce to roll out the employer transit benefits program recommended in the Stantec Bangor Transit Study Final Report (pg. 27, 2019) and proposed by the Community Connector. In a transit benefits program, employees are able to pay for transit using pre-tax dollars, which creates cost savings for both employees and employers.

Transportation Demand Management - Work with large employers to integrate transportation demand management strategies into wellness policies and/or adopt a citywide / townwide transportation demand management policy. The most robust version of this action involves adopting an ordinance with certain transportation demand-related requirements for employers above a certain size and municipalities themselves. The following strategies are often included in these requirements or recommended as opt-in programs for employers: parking cash out (employees who do not drive personal vehicles are offered the equivalent value of a parking space in cash); travel allowances (which offset the cost of parking, transit, or other modes of transportation equally); free or subsidized transit passes; tax-free benefits for transit and vanpool costs (via Employer Transit Benefit Program);

carpool/vanpool parking priority spots; secure, covered bike parking (and showers); shuttle service from a transit stop; and business wellness programs rewarding active transportation (potential area of collaboration with GO MAINE).

Events hosted by local businesses and community partners - Work with businesses, schools, libraries, and other community-based organizations to host or sponsor events that celebrate and encourage active and public transportation (e.g., bike or bus breakfasts). Work with community resources and cultural centers including libraries and schools to host active/transit programs (e.g., walking school buses, bike to school weeks, bike to the library prizes). Additionally, these community-based organizations are great places to disseminate information in the form of posters, flyers, and pamphlets about public transit routes, programs and how to use them, and active transit programs and health benefits.

Partner with universities in the region - This action can be incorporated into many of the other actions in this toolkit depending on community need and student interest. Ideas include website building, program information brochures, creative promotional materials or videos, business outreach and event planning, and more.

Public transit advertisement program for local businesses - Continue to expand the program for local businesses to advertise on buses, vans, bus stop infrastructure, and for highlighting local sponsors on the transportation hub website. This would be an additional source of revenue for the transit system and provide businesses with mobile advertising space. Establishing a pathway, process, and rates for advertisements and hosting the information and application on the transportation hub website, would provide a streamlined process and could facilitate more business participation.

Connections Across Existing Work and Other Climate Action Strategies

This toolkit builds on existing and growing momentum to support public and active transportation in the region through business and community partnerships. The Community Connector has started to develop an Employer Transit Benefit Program and a Transit-Supportive Toolkit for the Development Community, in line with recommendations from the Bangor Transit Study (2019). Additionally, GO MAINE offers a statewide platform for encouraging active and public transportation modes through programs, incentives, and partnerships with businesses and employers, though it is currently more relevant in the Portland region.

The Transportation Hub Website and information sharing recommendations of this toolkit, along with the vanpool/vanshare program, should coordinate with the recommendations in Toolkit #5 (Foster Complete and Walkable Neighborhoods) and Toolkit #3 (Create a Capacity Building Strategy for Public Transit) to align resources, information, and initiatives around public transportation options.

Photo by the Community Connector



Steps for Implementation

Employer engagement is a necessary first step for a number of the strategies listed above. For the sake of efficiency and effective communication, the outreach for many of the components – and specifically for the employer transit benefits program, transportation demand management, advertisement program, and employer-sponsored commuter routes – can be combined into a single outreach process outlined below:

PHASE 1

Preliminary Employer Outreach

Define topics for outreach – Decide on and clarify a menu of ways employers can engage with transportation systems. This might include the Public Transit Advertisement program, Employer Transit Benefit Programs, Employer-Sponsored Commute Routes, and voluntary Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies outlined above. At this stage, the process of defining each of these strategies should include a definition of the type of program, how it works, what the benefits are to employers, and what the benefits are to the transportation system and public. For the TDM strategies, municipalities can develop a preliminary checklist of TDM strategies that businesses can voluntarily opt into with the idea that it could eventually become required as policy.

Identify businesses for program input – Inventory a cross-section of large and small businesses, including those that currently participate in transit-supportive activities or that have in the past (e.g., through the existing advertisement program, a previous route expansion, etc.). Work with Chambers of Commerce and other business groups to identify additional businesses that are highly active in the public sphere, engaged in community activities, mission-driven, or large employers in the area.

Conduct outreach – Use connections through previous contacts, Chambers of Commerce, etc. to reach out to the identified businesses to gauge interest in each of the programs (or reach out directly if there are no readily available connections). Be prepared with the clear articulations of each of the programs (step 1) and a proposition for the businesses to have a conversation at a later date discussing the programs, and what they find appealing and unappealing about each of them. If there is funding available, these can be offered in a lunch and learn format as incentive to participate.

PHASE 2

Partnership and Program Development

Host a focus group – Collect all the feedback received from the initial conversations with businesses to shape the focus group conversations and questions. Meet with business owners and potentially employees, either individually or collectively. Present the strategies and ask people what seems doable and beneficial, and for the things that are not, what could be improved to make business participation more likely?

Define programs – Use the feedback from businesses, along with examples from precedents elsewhere, to define program details and logistics, including processes for enrollment and/or program rollout.

Advertise programs – Present the finalized programs to the businesses that participated in the focus group, and work with Chambers of Commerce and business groups to widely advertise the programs. Building awareness of the programs may include ongoing outreach by municipal staff to existing and new businesses, advertisements in local media outlets or local listservs, hosting events (e.g., lunch and learns, green drinks, webinars) with local organizations or businesses, or other modes.

KEY PARTNERS

- **Community Connector, City of Bangor**
- **BACTS and the Transit Committee** (with representatives of municipalities that financially support the Community Connector system)
- **Local and statewide organizations and advocacy groups** supporting transportation, such as GO MAINE, Bicycle Coalition of Maine, and Transportation for All
- **Local businesses and business groups**, including Chambers of Commerce, downtown organizations, and industry groups
- **Large employers and institutions**, including universities and colleges, hospitals
- **Community spaces**, including schools, libraries, senior centers, and apartment complexes, and assisted living facilities

Bike parking • Photo by Greg Edwards



PRECEDENTS

- **Choose Your Way Bellevue, Go Howard, and Ride Together** - These are three great examples of “transportation hub” websites that concentrate information about transit options, programs, and events.
- **King County Vanpool and Vanshare** - This vanpool and vanshare program in King County, Washington provides options for groups of people to commute together and split costs.
- **Ten Cities’ Strategies for Transportation Demand Management** - This is a collection of policy- and service-based strategies and actions implemented by ten different cities as part of Transportation Demand Management.
- **METRO Partnership Opportunities** - This is a collection of strategies identified by Houston’s METRO for businesses to partner with the public transit system.

COST CONSIDERATIONS

- Costs will vary notably depending on the action items pursued; rolling out a vanpool / vanshare program will be the most cost-intensive in terms of upfront costs (over \$1 million), whereas other steps such as the advertisement program only require staff time.
- Grants under “potential sources for funding” can help cover the planning, program development, and capital costs (as relevant) associated with these actions.
- Most importantly, effectively rolling out these actions will require staff capacity, which is limited for the Community Connector currently. Identifying strategies to expand capacity (via Toolkit #3: Create a Capacity Building Strategy for Public Transit) will be needed to enable this toolkit, as well.



Crosswalks at Main Street and Mill Street • Photo by Town of Orono

RESOURCES TO GET STARTED

- **MAPC Parking and Transportation Demand Management** - This resource describes a variety of parking and transportation demand management strategies, along with a few case studies of municipalities who have implemented them.
- **Transportation Toolkit for the Business Community** - This guide is a compilation of 14 fact sheets on topics related to transit-business partnerships that highlight strategies and why they are beneficial to employers, employees, and transit systems.
- **In Motion Tool Kit** - This tool kit is a guide to implementing a public and active transit campaign (with goals similar to GO MAINE) based on and provided by the In Motion program in King County, WA.
- **Sustainable CT** - The Sustainable CT program compiles actions for municipalities to take on to increase sustainability. See 6.3 “Encourage Smart Commuting.”

POTENTIAL SOURCES FOR FUNDING

- **MaineDOT Grants** - including Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Program, Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program, RAISE Grant.
- **Federal Transit Administration Grants** - including Accelerating Innovative Mobility, Enhancing Mobility Innovation, Surface Transportation Block Grant Program, Integrated Mobility Innovation, Public Transportation Innovation, Rural Transportation Assistance Program, Technical Assistance and Standards Development, Tribal Transit Formula Grants, Urbanized Area Formula Grants.
- **FTA §5303 Urban Transit Planning Funds** - BACTS can support background preparation and promotion of active and public transit through general assistance planning funds.