

CLIMATE ACTION TOOLKIT #3

Create a Capacity-Building Strategy for Public Transit

BANGOR AREA TRANSIT CENTER



PENOBSCOT
CLIMATE ACTION



MODERATE POTENTIAL
to achieve greenhouse gas
emissions reductions



HIGH POTENTIAL
to build community
resilience

Description of the Action

A Capacity Building Strategy for the Community Connector bus system will identify pathways for meeting current resource and capacity gaps, as well as pathways for meeting resource and capacity needs at various levels of growth. This action would be primarily led by the City of Bangor, as the operator of the Community Connector bus system, with support from the Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System (BACTS) and the Transit Committee; nevertheless, collaboration and involvement of municipal and tribal governments not yet served by the Community Connector bus network, as well as other key stakeholders (e.g., education and medical institutions), will both benefit the process and be imperative for working together towards public transportation goals as a region.

Through the Penobscot Climate Action process, community members emphasized the importance of public transportation in advancing equity, climate justice, community resilience, carbon mitigation, and regional collaboration goals. To continue to make progress towards a robust public transit system, it will require both meeting current capacity gaps, and scaling up resources, funding, and staff capacity to make that growth possible. The goal of this toolkit is to more clearly understand “what it will take” to both meet current needs and strategically grow the public transit system as a region.

Steps for Implementation

PHASE 1

Groundwork

Launch the process with the BACTS Transit Committee

– The Transit Committee, which focuses on regional collaboration around the operations of the Community Connector, would spearhead the development of the capacity building strategy. The Transit Committee includes staff from the Community Connector and the municipalities that financially contribute to the operation of the public transit system; consider if and how the committee can support participation from other constituents (e.g., staff from local governments that may be served in the future by the Community Connector, staff from local transit providers such as Penquis, or others) that may have insight important to the capacity building strategy.

Understand community-driven visions for public transit

– Draw on recent and ongoing transportation planning processes that have gathered or are currently collecting insight on community-driven visions for public transportation in the region. Use this insight to assess: What kind of support is there for growth in the public transit system? When community members are envisioning the future of the public transportation system, what are they envisioning? Focus on the insight of community members who will be most impacted by climate change, in particular, including older adults, residents with disabilities, and low-income residents, among other priority populations. Use this

How This Action Supports the Goals of Penobscot Climate Action

- ★ **Equity and Environmental Justice.** Public transportation increases access to affordable transportation options, especially for individuals who are not able to drive or not able to afford a private vehicle.
- ★ **Environmental Health.** Public transportation reduces the number of trips taken in a private vehicle, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other forms of air pollution.
- ★ **Community Resilience.** Access to resources—whether that’s healthcare, groceries, school, or a job—is critical for community resilience. Public transportation expands access to resources both day-to-day and in an emergency.
- ★ **Regional Collaboration.** The Community Connector bus system operates at a regional scale. Developing this strategy calls on local governments in the region to work together to strategize around resource constraints and make a joint commitment towards growing the transit system.

Photo in upper left: Buses stop off at the Bangor Area Transit Center • Photo by the Community Connector



insight to contextualize current resource and capacity needs (phase 2), as well as to define a set of growth scenarios in line with community goals (phase 3).

PHASE 2

Assessing and Meeting Current Resource and Capacity Needs

Outline the capacity of the current Community Connector system – Outline the current service provided (e.g., total service miles per week and/or other metrics) as well as the capacity and resource requirements to operate the Community Connector sustainably at that scale (e.g., number of buses, drivers, administrative staff, operational budget, capital budget, etc.).

Assess resource and capacity gaps – Outline current gaps that may be preventing the system from operating at full capacity. Resource or capacity constraints may include

KEY PARTNERS

- **City of Bangor, Community Connector**
- **BACTS and the Transit Committee** (with representatives of municipalities that financially support the Community Connector system)
- **Local neighboring governments** currently not yet served by the Community Connector bus network
- **Additional local transit and paratransit service providers**, such as Penquis
- **Community constituents** who depend on, or who could most benefit from, access to affordable, accessible public transit
- **State and Federal partners**, such as MaineDOT and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

shortages in vehicles, drivers, administrative staff, or other constraints.

Host strategic planning workshops – Host strategic planning workshops with town and city councils to discuss gaps and to identify, assess, and further develop potential solutions. This step could occur at multiple points concurrently with developing a suite of pathways for meeting capacity needs (below).

Identify pathways for meeting capacity needs – Consider partnering with a consultant to support this step. Together, research, identify, and evaluate potential pathways for meeting capacity needs through new financing structures, funding sources, as well as other potentially cost-effective service solutions. This process will likely include:

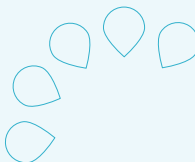
- Exploring cost-effective service models, such as microtransit or vanpool / vanshare programs, that could meet capacity needs or expand service without substantially raising costs. Currently it is difficult to attract and retain drivers with a commercial driver license (CDL); micro-transit may expand the qualified labor pool if a CDL isn't required, and vanpool or vanshare programs may sidestep that challenge altogether.
- Looking into models for restructuring how the Community Connector is funded so that municipal costs are consistent and can be expected a number of years out. Building a consistent funding structure would allow the Community Connector to build and draw from savings, rather than requesting funding on a project-by-project basis.
- Exploring new or expanded revenue streams, which may include modified municipal cost-sharing structures, grants, partnerships, or other revenue streams. Consider business and community partnership opportunities as outlined in Toolkit #4.

Connections Across Existing Work and Other Climate Action Strategies

This action builds off of and complements a number of actions that are already underway, which are working towards a more robust and high-quality public transit system, including:

- **Implementing a fixed stop system** (as opposed to the current flag-stop operation), and building out amenities based on stop type;
- **Implementing smart bus technology systems**, including real-time bus tracking, mobile payment options, and trip planning functionality on the Community Connector website and on third-party apps (e.g., Google Maps);
- **Conducting a study on how to expand service in the near-term**, including specifically evening service, with the plan to launch pilots based on findings;
- **Conducting a fare structure analysis to identify how to improve the fare structure to be affordable and equitable**, while also eliminating Community Connector staff burden;
- **Launching and running a free commercial drivers license (CDL) training program** through the City of Bangor that connects participants with bus driver and municipal public works positions to fill employment gaps.

Climate Action Toolkits #4 and #5 will also further support the growth of a robust and high-quality transit system.



Outline and implement promising pathways – Outline and implement promising pathways to meet resource and capacity needs. Establish regular points for the Transit Committee to evaluate whether the pathways are meeting intended outcomes.

PHASE 3

Outlining Pathways for Growth

Create growth scenarios – Use the community-driven visions to craft a set of growth scenarios, such as a slight growth in service, medium growth, and robust growth over different timeframes. The scenarios could be defined by a percent increase in service; for example, the “medium growth scenario” may be defined by a 15% increase in service miles per week. It is recommended that the scenarios avoid specifying specific routes or changes in service; however, it would be useful to note what that increase could look like (e.g., this increase would allow for night and weekend service at a given frequency, etc.).

Outline capacity and resource requirements – Using the baseline scenario as a reference, outline the capacity and resource requirements to meet each of the growth scenarios, including staff capacity, operating costs, and capital budget. Consider potential needs for expanded administrative capacity (e.g., grant writing, legal support), and what it might take to retain drivers (e.g., cost-competitive salaries and benefits).

Host strategic planning workshops – Host strategic planning workshops with town and city councils to discuss resource and capacity needs to enable growth and to identify, assess, and further develop potential solutions. This step could occur at multiple points concurrently with developing a suite of pathways for meeting capacity needs.

Identify pathways for meeting capacity needs – Consider partnering with a consultant to support this step. Together,

research, identify, and evaluate potential pathways for meeting capacity needs. These will likely include expanded models of what is identified for meeting existing needs and/or potential pathways that may seem most viable within a longer timeframe.

PHASE 4

Ongoing Community Conversations

Host a series of community conversations – Bring the findings of the capacity building strategy to a wide range of community spaces to discuss opportunities for growing the public transportation system and what it would take to invest in this growth as a region. These spaces may include, for example, town/city councils, local universities, large employers, youth spaces, among others. The goal would be to both continue to build support for the public transit system, as well as share ways that business or community partnerships may help play a role in expanding sources of revenue. See Toolkit #4 for more details.

COST CONSIDERATIONS

- BACTS is able to lead the planning process; BACTS staff time and any consultant fees can be covered by FTA §5303 Urban Transit Planning Funds.
- Funding sources and financing pathways for meeting resource and capacity needs will be identified through the capacity building strategy.

POTENTIAL SOURCES FOR FUNDING

- **FTA §5303 Urban Transit Planning Funds** to facilitate the development of the capacity building strategy (including the planning process and any consultant costs).

PRECEDENTS

- **Building Revenue Sources (2015)** - Article in Mass Transit, highlighting examples of different revenue streams used by four different transit agencies.

RESOURCES TO GET STARTED

- **Local Funding Options for Public Transportation (2023)** - This study by the Victoria Transport Policy Institute compiles a wide range of literature and research documenting potential revenue streams for public transit systems. The Institute is based in Canada, but most revenue streams are also applicable within the States.
- **APTA Economic Impact of Public Transportation Investment (2020)** – This study models the economic impact of investing in public transportation, and provides a great “business case” for the Community Connector growth scenarios. The study looks at three different growth scenarios (business as usual, medium growth, and larger growth) and models the benefits to the economy and cost savings to residents and businesses (for both users and non-users of public transit) correlated with every dollar invested.
- **Transportation Investment Strategy Tool Documentation (2023)** – The Transportation Investment Strategy Tool was developed to help states or regions in the northeast calculate potential outcomes of various low-carbon transportation strategies. See section 4.5.2 “Bus Operating Improvements” (page 43) for assumptions that may be useful for developing the growth scenarios, such as the “estimated percent change in ridership per percent change in service level.”
- **APTA Transit Workforce Shortage (2022)** – This report summarizes root causes of driver shortages and provides recommendations for meeting workforce needs.