



Maine

Overview

The Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) focuses on the economic development potential of transit along with the link between transit and land use and environment. MaineDOT staff commented that agencies statewide recognize that offering transit to visitors, both from within Maine and out of state, is important to economic development and the tourism industry. In addition, businesses are taking an interest in providing alternatives for their employees and thus are working with MaineDOT to support local transit and also to provide lower-capital investment systems such as park and ride and vanpools. MaineDOT is optimistic that success in these areas will lead to a reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) but realize that will have an impact on revenue from the Federal and State gas tax.

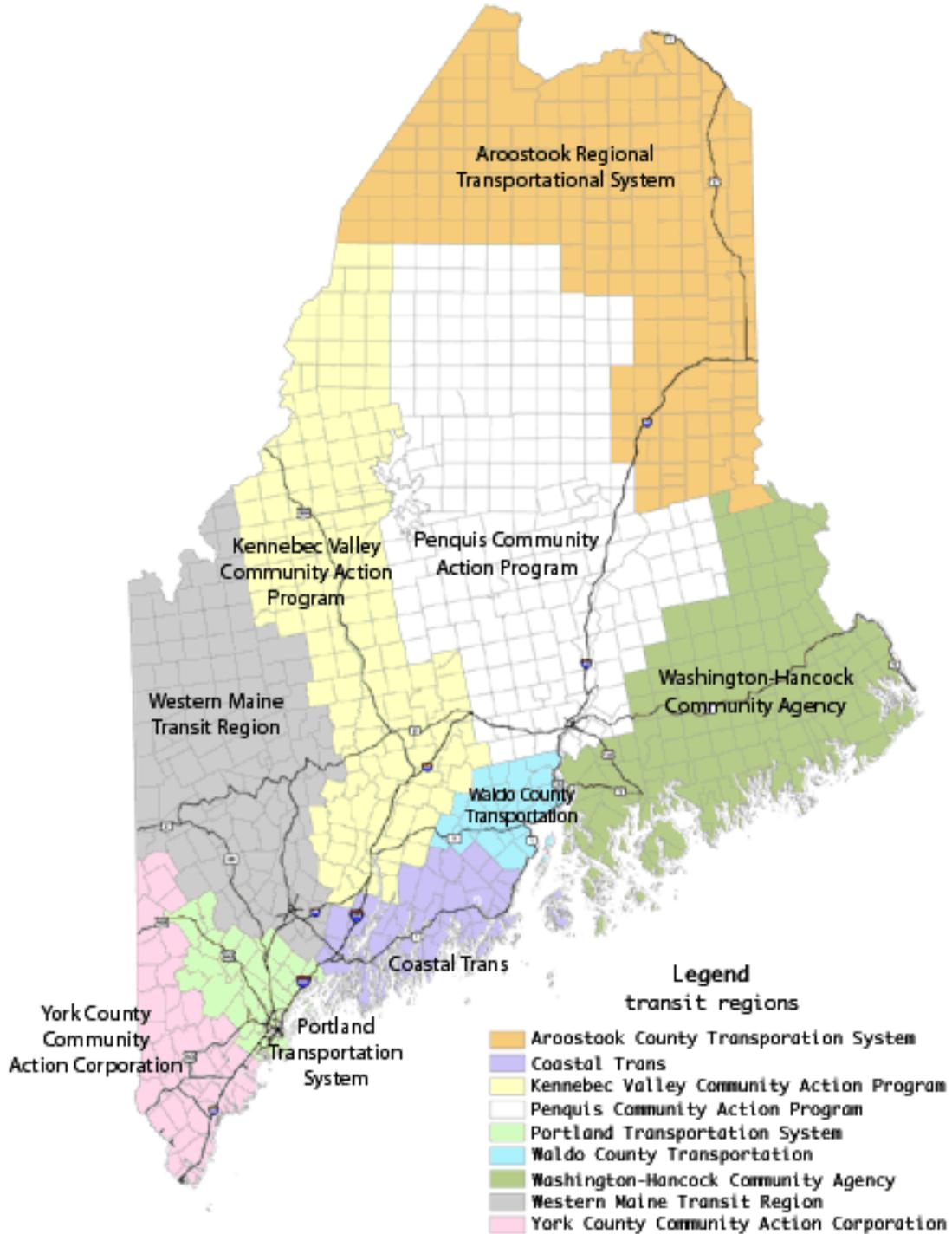
In addition, MaineDOT has consciously pushed a “seamless connection between modes whenever possible” for the past 15 years. This involves direct connections in terms of co-locating services and coordinating schedules for bus-train, bus-ferry, and also intercity (private) services. One recent example is the Portland Transportation Center in which Concord Coach invited Amtrak to be housed in the bus station, which has allowed for people to be flexible in terms of traveling by bus one way and train the other.

Context

Rural Transit

Maine has nine designated regional transportation providers (see Figure 1), which are non-profits that primarily provide public and human service demand-response transportation services within their respective regions although several also provide fixed route service. Cities and both non-profit and for-profit entities provide additional fixed route and demand response services. One of the regional providers, Western Maine Transit Region, shares its region with CommunityConcepts, a non-profit that provides medical transportation. Although there are 15 recipients of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5311 funds, 18 transit providers offer services in rural areas, including ferry services. There are six private intercity providers, three of which have routes that are subsidized by MaineDOT.

Figure 1: Transit Regions and Regional Transportation Providers in Maine



Note: Portland Transportation System should be Regional Transportation Program

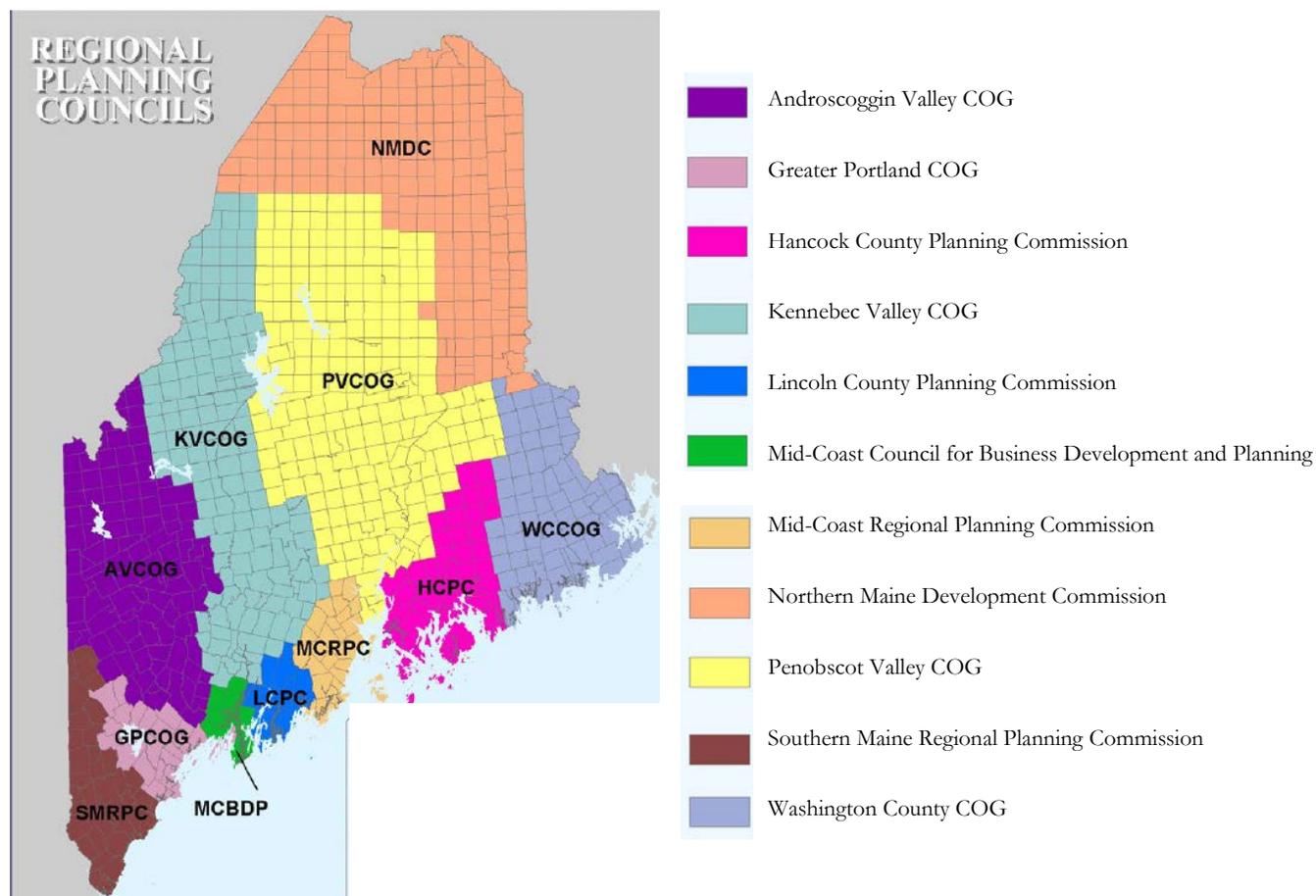
Source: [Explore Maine](#)

Institutional Structure

The Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) Division of Statewide Multimodal Planning was created in 2008 from the Division of Statewide Transportation Planning, which had been focused on highway and bridge, and the Office of Passenger Transportation, which was created in 1996 to begin to foster a multimodal approach. The Division has 15 staff.

Maine has 11 planning regions, each of which are overseen by a regional planning council (RPC) and have borders that closely align with the nine transit regions (see Figure 2). The RPCs are housed within planning and development commissions or councils of government (COGs). Four of the regions contain metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) with which the RPCs coordinate closely; for one of the MPOs, the director also holds the transportation director position at the regional council. The RPC boundaries are loosely based on the boundaries of seven economic development councils and, as such, the RPCs are oriented around economic development but also oversee housing, transportation, hazardous materials, and other functions.

Figure 2: Maine Regional Planning Councils



Source: [Multimodal Six-Year Capital Improvement Plan](#)

Funding

Table 1 summarizes Federal funding for transit in the State. According to the [State Management Plan](#), half of the funding for FTA Section 5310 (Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities) and Section 5311 (Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas) programs are distributed to the eight regions by a formula based on population, road mileage, and square miles while the other half is designated for projects identified through the planning process.

Aside from the FTA grant programs, MaineDOT has taken advantage of the [Congestion Mitigation Air Quality \(CMAQ\) Improvement Program](#), which is jointly administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the FTA and funds projects that improve air quality and reduce congestion to support three-year start-up periods for the Explorer systems, which are innovative transit systems targeted at tourists. Two other MaineDOT programs that encourage local transit funding are described in the text boxes below. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is another source of transit funding in Maine. The DHHS [Office of MaineCare Services](#), which administers the State health insurance program, contracts with the nine designated regional transportation providers (see Figure 1) to provide free transportation to eligible health care services for eligible patients. Some of these designated regional transportation providers are only demand-response and only receive funding from DHHS although others receive operating funds primarily from DHHS and capital and planning funding from MaineDOT.

Table 1: Transit Funding in Fiscal Year 2009 (in millions)

Funding Program	Amount
Section 5311 (Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas)	\$5.4
Section 5310 (Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities)	\$0.7
Sections 5303 (Metropolitan Planning)	\$0.4
Sections 5304 (Statewide Planning)	\$0.1
Section 5307 (Urbanized Area Formula)	\$5.0
Section 5309 (Bus and Bus Facilities)	\$1.9
Section 5316 (Job Access and Reverse Commute)	\$0.7
Section 5317 (New Freedom)	\$0.4
STP Flex	\$0
CMAQ	\$0.7
Section 5320 (Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks)	\$0.5
Federal Total	\$15.8

Source: MaineDOT

Transit-oriented Tax Increment Financing Districts

One recent development in transit funding in Maine is the passage of [legislation](#) for transit-oriented tax increment financing (TIF) districts, which amended State TIF regulations to allow local governments to use increased tax revenue from a designated corridor or area to create or improve transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities, including transit operator salaries, fuel, and maintenance as well as transit-oriented development. Two applications have been submitted so far: [South Portland](#) and Orono.

Urban-Rural Initiative Program Transit Bonus Payment

At the State level, MaineDOT allocates \$500,000 a year to be distributed as a [transit bonus payment](#) under the [Urban-Rural Initiative Program](#) (URIP), which replaced the Local Road Assistance Program and provides funds for capital improvements to local roads and rural State Aid minor collector roads. If a municipality with a fixed route transit service that meets certain requirements has increased its local funding for transit since the base year of FY2001, MaineDOT provides a “bonus” in URIP road funding equivalent to what is budgeted over and above the FY2001 transit budget. Thus the “bonus” given toward road funding is based on the community’s contribution to transit. The intent is for the municipality to be able to increase its support of transit while not necessarily decreasing the funding it has available for road and bridge projects. Requests often exceed the budget so MaineDOT awards the bonuses by dividing equally among all eligible communities. For FY2009, MaineDOT received \$1.7 million worth of transit bonus payment requests so communities received \$0.35 to every \$1 requested.

Participation of Rural Transit in Statewide Planning Process

Transit agencies primarily interact with MaineDOT rather than their regional planning council for short-term planning, operations, and funding issues while the regional planning councils provide guidance on long-term planning efforts such as the statewide long-range transportation plan (LRTP) and its regional components, described below. Transit agencies reported a long history of a close working relationship with MaineDOT. One transit agency commented that “the state has been a great partner from our perspective” and that despite turf issues between various levels of government, all players, in particular the State, “play well with each other” and “take off their turf hats” in figuring out how to make a project successful and which agency has what responsibilities. There is also a robust referral network among transit operators so that when a call is received from outside of one operator’s service area, it can refer the call to an operator in that service area. According to a MaineDOT official, this is possible “because everyone knows everyone else.”

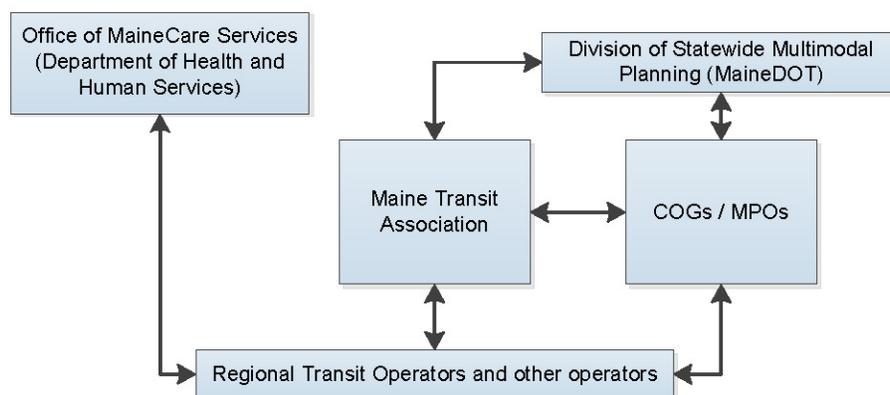
MaineDOT has biennial cooperative agreements with each of the RPCs. The agreements task regional planning staff to organize events and outreach for planning efforts such as the statewide LRTP, communicate information, and facilitate technical assistance. MaineDOT views its relationship with the RPCs as beneficial because they serve as an extension of staff, have a

According to a MaineDOT official, COGs “bring a larger, more varied perspective and that is the value we are looking for.”

better sense of local needs, and can bring a broader perspective to transportation. MaineDOT meets quarterly with all of RPCs as a group.

Figure 3 shows the relationships and connections between agencies involved in rural transit and statewide planning in the State. There are fairly direct lines of communication among all entities.

Figure 3: Relationships between Agencies Involved in Rural Transportation Planning



Major Planning and Project Initiatives

MaineDOT has developed a number of plans that include rural transit, conducted statewide promotion of multimodal systems, and assisted in the development and replication of innovative tourism-based transit systems. MaineDOT has also worked with the [University of Vermont Transportation Research Center](#) on several research projects, including smart growth and transit-oriented development in rural areas.

Statewide Plans

Maine's statewide LRTP, [Connecting Maine](#) (2008), encompasses land use, transportation, and economic development (see Figure 1). It emphasizes the need for funding, greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction, energy conservation, and improvements to quality of life. The framework of the plan is focused on strategic policy, planning, and capital investment needs for 38 Corridors of Regional Economic Significance for Transportation (CRESTs) identified by the Regional Transportation Assessments completed by each of the RPCs through a two-year process of public outreach and assessment of existing conditions. The corridors and the plans are intended to be multimodal; and although often focused on intercity connections, many of these cities are classified as rural and/or the corridors pass through rural areas. One example of a CREST with transit is the Lewiston-Auburn Downtown Connector, focusing on commuter and intercity service as well as connections to the University of Maine-Farmington. The RPCs used the CRESTs to develop regional strategic investment plans that are included in *Connecting Maine*.

Figure 1: Cover of Connecting Maine

Source: [MaineDOT Connecting Maine website](#)

Connecting Maine also contains a section on Environmental Stewardship, in which it outlines how MaineDOT must work to help the State meet the recommendations of the [Maine Climate Action Plan](#), developed from the Maine Greenhouse Gas Initiative. *Connecting Maine* states, “Long term strategies will need to increase the availability of low-GHG travel choices, such as transit (rail and bus), vanpools, walking, and biking. Complementary policies will need to address land-use and location efficiency policies, and create transit-based incentives, to improve the attractiveness of low-GHG travel choices.” A [report](#) by the State Department of Environmental Protection for the Climate Action Plan lists transit ridership as a potential performance measure for slowing VMT growth.

In 2002, MaineDOT completed the report *An Analysis of Transit Provision in Maine*, which reviewed transit services statewide, identified unmet needs, and developed recommendations. MaineDOT has relied on the study as a reference point for tracking progress and began work on an update to the report in fall 2009. The study is expected to focus on several elements, including economic contribution of transit services, funding strategies, performance measures, marketing, training and customer service, connections to the State LRTP, and the promotion and expansion of transit services.

The [Biennial Capital Work Plan](#) (previously the Biennial Transportation Improvement Plan) lists anticipated capital transportation funding and MaineDOT’s strategy to apply this funding to specific transportation improvements throughout the State. The transit information for this plan is a result of the Biennial Operations Plan (BOP), a public process specifically for transit that is required by State law and serves to meet the Federal local coordinated plan requirements. The BOP consists of a series of public

meetings held at the regional level to discuss current services and needs, ongoing coordination efforts and potential opportunities, and future plans. The meetings involve MaineDOT, the MPO, the RPC, transit agencies, advocacy groups, and other key State agencies such as DHHS and the Department of Labor. The result of the BOP is a document that describes the existing transit services (e.g., ridership and capital needs) as well as future plans and needs of each system. For MaineDOT, the plan provides a source of potential projects to be incorporated into the statewide transportation improvement program (STIP).

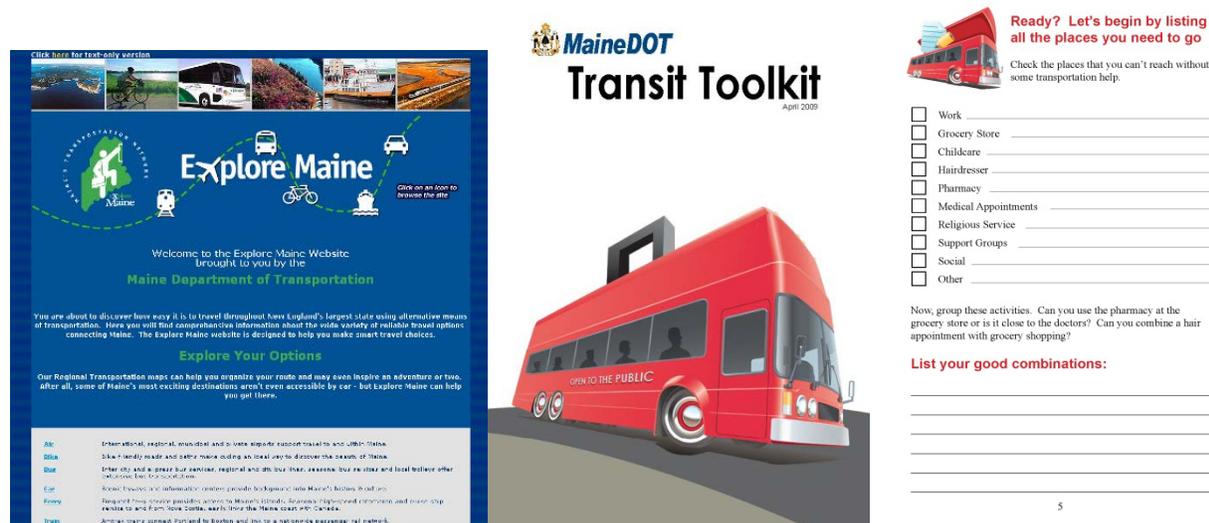
The “people at the table are those mentioned before – regional planners, MPO planners, human service transit operators – people who have a say so in what can be done”- MaineDOT official

The [Multimodal Six-Year Capital Improvement Plan](#) was developed to better link the Capital Work Plan and the LRTP. Both capital plans feed into the STIP.

Multimodal Outreach and Coordination

MaineDOT has a coherent, integrated approach to transportation statewide, thus providing its rural areas with coverage they otherwise might not receive. MaineDOT’s Explore Maine website (<http://www.exploremaine.org>) provides comprehensive information about the wide variety of reliable travel options (air, bike, bus, car, ferry, and train) within Maine. According to MaineDOT, the website invites the visitor “to experience an alternative mode” and provides information on connectivity between modes and how to access places otherwise inaccessible by car. The website evolved from the Strategic Passenger Transportation Plan, a result of the multimodal initiative begun in 1996. The website is accompanied by the [MaineDOT Transit Toolkit](#), which is a workbook featuring a needs assessment, resources for seniors, DHHS information, and a comprehensive list of transit operators. The Maine Transit Association provides a similar directory. Figure 4 illustrates the website homepage and cover and self-assessment form of the toolkit.

Figure 4: Screenshot of Explore Maine website and cover and self-assessment from the Transit Toolkit



Source: [Explore Maine website](#)

MaineDOT and the Maine Turnpike Authority sponsor a statewide commuter program known as [Go Maine](#), which provides an on-line interactive commuter ride-matching system, a trip planner to find or offer non-commuting rides, and a personal commute log and works with employers to help them offer their employees carpool options and on-site bicycle racks. The program is administered by the Greater Portland Council of Governments but is statewide and is particularly valuable to areas without fixed route transit such as rural areas.

Innovative Transit Systems

The Maine Explorer systems consist of four fixed route, free, seasonal bus systems aimed to serve major tourist destinations within Maine. Two are winter services for skiing areas ([Sugarloaf Explorer](#) and [Mountain Explorer](#)) and two are summer services for coastal areas ([Island Explorer](#) and [Shoreline Explorer](#)). The Explorers operate under different models in terms of funding and management. For example, Shoreline Explorer is a public-private partnership in which three private trolley operators provide publicly funded routes to connect six communities, while the Island Explorer is a result of a partnership between a transit agency, the U.S. National Park Service (NPS), MaineDOT, a major company, and local businesses and communities (see text box below).

Figure 5: Island Explorer shuttle and real-time arrival information



Source: Volpe Center (2009)

The Island Explorer

The first Explorer system, Island Explorer, was initiated locally; once it had been developed and formalized, it became the model used by the State for the other three systems. The Island Explorer is a service provided by Downeast Transportation, a private non-profit agency that previously had provided limited fixed route service to Hancock County. The idea for a seasonal, free service arose from concerns by Friends of Acadia, a non-profit that supports the Acadia National Park, about visitor experience and resource protection; namely, congestion and air pollution. The NPS was able to supply the initial buses and MaineDOT, using CMAQ funds, was able to provide the initial operating funds. Since then, the service has capitalized on its link to economic development for the area by getting support funding from local communities and businesses and L.L. Bean, a Maine-based clothing and outdoor recreation equipment retail company. In addition, MaineDOT has provided funding for a transit study by an outside consultant and has helped Downeast Transportation's year-round transit services access Section 5316 (Job Access and Reverse Commute) and additional Section 5311 funds.

The Island Explorer has resulted in benefits to more than the initial targets of visitors and natural resources. For example, the town of Bar Harbor has benefited from a decrease in congestion in downtown. However, even more importantly, according to the General Manager of Downeast Transportation, the entire service area and the year-round transit service has benefited from the implementation of the Island Explorer. The Island Explorer provided Downeast Transportation with an opportunity to redesign the year-round service by proving it was possible to use non-traditional transit anchors to support traditional service. The Island Explorer was able to serve employees and mobility challenged people as well as general tourists and helped the development of a relationship with employers that led to a commuting service. Thus investment in a tourism service helped Downeast Transportation improve the rest of its services, in particular customer service and the quality of the service delivered.

The Island Explorer has been able to continue to expand and improve its services, including the implementation of intelligent transportation system (ITS) technologies to communicate the real-time location and schedules of buses. The newest development is the [Acadia Gateway Center](#) project, a new transportation hub, maintenance facility, and welcome center in Trenton, Maine, intended to remove cars from the road before the bridge onto Mount Desert Island. Funding support is coming from FTA, FHWA, NPS, MaineDOT, and local entities.

Observations and Challenges

Funding

Funding was identified as a challenge by all participants. MaineDOT observed that the BOP provides an opportunity every two years to report on funding needs but that the onus is on the municipalities to report transit needs and be transit advocates so that the State can act accordingly. Often, municipalities focus on highway/bridge needs only. One transit agency noted that the State has “been very creative and supportive” but that funding for rural planning is challenging because of the lack of a dedicated Federal funding source (no metropolitan and statewide planning program equivalent) and that funding for capital and operations is challenged by the increasingly difficult ability to obtain a local match for which the State is unlikely to be able to provide support. MaineDOT has been able to provide rural planning funds through Section 5311.

In this environment, communities that are not growing and thus are not at risk of becoming ineligible for FTA operating funding benefit from the lack of growth. Many transit operators receive funding through MaineCare and other human services sources; and as these have experienced reductions, the impact has passed on to transit operators. Human services transportation relies heavily on volunteer drivers, especially in rural areas; and this has helped in funding shortfalls.

Crossing borders

Transit agencies reported that the primary obstacle to providing service more seamlessly across state borders is the reporting and registration issues with regulations by the Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration (FMCSA).

Staffing

MaineDOT, RPCss, and transit providers all reported reductions in transit and administrative staff; but also noted that among remaining staff, there is a lot of dedication and energy to get the job done.

Tribal Transit

Maine has four Federally recognized Tribes (the Passamaquoddy Tribe, Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians, the Houlton Band of Maliseet, and the Penobscot Nation of Maine). The Passamaquoddy Tribe, which consists of two separate entities, and the Penobscot Nation of Maine have developed LRTPs and participated in *Connecting Maine*. In terms of transit, the Passamaquoddy Tribe has been a subcontractor to a Section 5311 subrecipient but has asked the subrecipient to take over transit services recently due to financial trouble. The Tribe is now working with consultants to apply for FTA’s [Tribal Transit Program](#). The Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians has been a recipient of the Tribal Transit Program and funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and does not have any interaction with MaineDOT as the Tribal Transit Program does not require coordination of its recipients with other transit entities. The Penobscot Nation is the only urban tribe in the U.S. and, as such, is not eligible for the Tribal Transit Program, which is run through the Section 5311 program and requirements. MaineDOT has requested

that the Tribe be allowed to have presumed eligibility but has not yet been successful. However, the Penobscot Tribe has increasingly been working with and receiving technical assistance from the Bangor MPO. This relationship has been recognized by FHWA in a [case study](#) on innovative consultation practices. A fifth tribe, which is not Federally recognized, is not geographically consolidated and so does not have its own set of services.

Conclusions

- MaineDOT, RPCs, MPOs, designated regional transportation agencies, and other public, non-profit, and for-profit transit agencies as well as other partners form a collaborative, coordinated transit network best reflected in MaineDOT's Explore Maine website.
- The innovative "Explorer" transit systems provide opportunities for economic development and improved general service. The Island Explorer is a result of partnership between USDOT, NPS, MaineDOT, the local transit operator, and local towns and businesses (e.g., L.L. Bean).
- The URIP Transit Bonus Payment and Transit-Oriented TIF are examples of State programs that have provided incentives for local governments and communities to invest their own funds in transit.
- The Maine LRTP is multimodal and includes designated corridors throughout the State, including rural areas, that focus on land use, economic development, and transportation.