

CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE
Committee on Sustainability and Transportation
Councilor Regina Phillips (D3), Chair
Councilor Victoria Pelletier (D2)
Councilor Anna Bullett (D4)

Approved Minutes July 10, 2024

Members Present: Councilor Phillips, Councilor Bullett, Councilor Pelletier, Councilor Rodriguez

Staff Present: Troy Moon, Erin Ferrell, Dena Libner, Mike Murray, Greg Jordan, John Peverada, Kayley Weeks

Meeting was called to order.

June 12 Minutes

The June 12, 2024 meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Sustainability Update

Presented by Troy Moon

The Sustainability Office has been working with constituents such as Avesta Housing to make the DIY Electrify program more beneficial to the community. They recently added Energy Star-certified air conditioners, Instant pots, and rice cookers to the list of eligible items to their DIY Electrify! Program.

On July 17, the Sustainability Office held their second Landcare Lunchbreak webinar of the season. In the webinar “The Dirty Truth About Urban Runoff”, guest speaker Will Everitt, with Friends of Casco Bay, will discuss urban runoff and how landcare practices have affected our water ecosystems.

The next two Landcare Lunchbreak webinars will cover:

“Healthy Lawn Care Made Easy” with Cumberland County Soil & Water Conservation District
“Preparing Your Lawn for Winter” with landcare professional Jesse O’Brien

The Sustainability Office helped launch the City’s first electric trash truck on June 17. It is the first electric heavy duty truck in Maine. Our office secured grant funding to support the purchase.

On June 25, staff joined Avesta Housing staff and residents of Butler Payson and Carleton buildings for a lunch cookout. This was a great engagement opportunity to talk with residents about some of their initiatives, especially DIY Electrify! and their Community Composting Program.

The Sustainability Office will be partnering with Portland Bike Party, Bike Coalition of Maine, and others to host this month's in-person Climate and Coffee event at Orange Bike Brewing. Everyone is welcome to join this event.

Councilor Comment on Sustainability Update

Councilor Phillips thanks Sustainability Staff for their recent efforts.

Update from Greater Portland Metro

Presented by Mike Tremblay

Greater Portland Metro formed in 1966. They operate fixed route buses and ADA paratransit services. There are Ten bus routes serving 8 municipalities including: Brunswick, Falmouth, Freeport, Gorham, Portland, South Portland, Westbrook, and Yarmouth. South Portland may join this year. Metro employees over 100 people and growing. There were 2.1 million annual boardings in CY 2019. Metro operates 44 buses (31 diesel; 11 CNG; 2 Electric).

Greater Portland Metro's Mission is to "provide a public transportation experience that is frequent, fast, safe, and simple."

Transit Together is a study done to simplify transit for riders. Some of the recommendations include Route 1 - Munjoy Hill simplification and new service to the Jetport which have been completed. Under consideration is a simplified Maine Mall service and extensions to the Eastern Waterfront. Route 8 Bidirectionality is to be discussed.

The Jetport service changes to Route 7 increase service consistency to the Jetport and Hutchins Drive and adds service to Congress St. Additionally, the changes to Route 5 increase travel times between downtown Portland and Maine Mall, increase service consistency, and improve on-time performance..

Paused for Councilor Comment

Councilor Pelletier asked Mike Tremblay to expand on the Public Outreach done in May 2023 and what the general support was?

Mike Tremblay responds by stating that Greater Portland Metro involved the community by soliciting feedback on the finalized plan. Greater Portland Metro presented to S&T, held a virtual meeting, went directly to residents of 100 State St, and held a live public meeting at Portland Public Library all in May 2023. Greater Portland Metro also distributed flyers in places where changes to transit were happening.

Update from Greater Portland Metro Continued

Service expansion considerations follow a process and are first brought to the ridership committee, then Metro speaks to relevant city staff and counselors, cost estimate, community outreach, and implementation. These steps are why service expansion is a slow process.

There's currently no service to the VA Clinic because there would be a 9 minute deviation to get to West Commercial St, an extra bus would need to be added to this route to maintain the 30 min service. If Route 8 where to serve the VA Clinic it would have to be taken out of the neighborhood it currently serves where Butler School, Harbor Terrace, and 100 State St are located and moved to Valley St down West Commercial St. The best option to add service to the VA Clinic would be to add a route.

Paused for Councilor Comment

Councilor Phillips asked about South Portland rejoining the Greater Portland Metro, and if any of those routes would make sense to serve the VA Clinic.

Mike Tremblay stated that further research would need to be done since South Portland has not recently updated any of their bus routes, and he does not have an answer at this time.

Councilor Bullett asked if any of the routes currently have an express and a local option, and if that will ever be a consideration.

Mike Tremblay stated that we currently have that with the Husky Line and Route 4, and the Breeze. But, Metro doesn't currently have a system where express routes run on the same route.

Councilor Bullet asked if there's been an effort to survey any of the VA patients to find out where they are coming from.

Mike Tremblay stated VA staff are organizing a meeting as soon as next week about that topic. He hopes the information will inform Metro.

Councilor Bullett thanks Mike Tremblay.

Councilor Rodriguez asked how bus stop infrastructure is decided.

Mike Tremblay stated that it has to do with local right of way. Street width and easements from the adjacent property owner are considered. High boarding stops are usually considered for a shelter or a bench whereas low volume boarding stops are not.

Update from Greater Portland Metro Continued

Metro Service Improvement Priorities and Challenges for 2024-2027 include; implementing microtransit in Falmouth (2024), Route 7 service frequency improvement and high frequency corridor (2024, integrating of South Portland bus routes (2025), improving service to Eastern Waterfront (2025-2026), Route 8 route alignment and bidirectionality (2026), expanding

microtransit (2026-2027+), and the Gorham-Westbrook-Portland Rapid Transit Service (2029-2030).

Councilor Comment on Greater Portland Metro Update

Councilor Phillips asked about the Sunday schedule, holidays, and late night services.

Mike Tremblay stated that all of those things are possible, however, it's just about finding and funding bus operators.

Ed Suslovic thanked the councilors for the opportunity to have this discussion and to remember these ideas come budget time next year since these changes take resources.

Councilor Phillips thanks Ed Suslovic.

Councilor Bullett expressed her gratitude and asked if the bus fleet is owned or leased, and how much a bus costs.

Mike Tremblay responded that Greater Portland Metro owns their fleet and the general cost of a bus is \$500,000 and electric buses cost \$900,000 to a million dollars. These purchases are bonded and take years to plan for.

Councilor Bullett asked if Greater Portland Metro has the technology for buses to change traffic signals from red to green. If that technology hasn't already been purchased, what does that investment look like?

Mike Tremblay stated that they will be testing that technology next week on major corridors.

Councilor Bullett asked if other equity factors come into play when considering bus stop infrastructure. What can the council do to get funding and permission from property owners to add more shelters?

Mike Tremblay confirms equity is a factor. The Transit Stop Action Project that was not mentioned in this presentation includes research on accessibility. Mike mentioned another option if a property owner isn't willing to sign an easement agreement, Metro can also add a bulbout to the streetscape.

Councillor Bullett comments that she would like to see a cost benefit analysis for some of the improvements mentioned.

Greg Jordan closed the discussion by reminding the councilors of the ambitious goals stated in Portland Plan 2030 and One Climate Future for multimodal transportation and public transit. The City can help guide this shift by supporting financial decisions that include Greater Portland Metro.

Councilor Phillips supports adding this to the Council's goals, and Councilor Bullett expressed her support.

Update Worker Permit Sticker Program

Presented by Greg Jordan

Greg Jordan discussed the need for access to downtown street parking for downtown workers who cannot rely on public transportation due to late night work schedules.

First, the City is considering garage capacity by surveying garages. This would be the least expensive alternative. The city must consider the demand for short term parking. The City wants to incentivize parking that supports the City's goals previously outlined in One Climate Future and Portland Plan 2030. With a permit, downtown workers would still be required to pay the meter for the entire time they park.

Extending the operational hours for Route 8 is being considered by the City, however this would not help individuals working past 11pm.

Another consideration is increasing the 2 hour parking to 10 hour parking on some streets.

There are many logistics to consider such as application, and employee time.

More work is to be done on considering each of these alternatives. Greg Jordan and John Peverada will come back to the committee in September with more details about the program. If appropriate a public hearing will also be held in September.

Councilor Comment on Discussion and Workshop Regarding Downtown Worker Parking

Councilor Phillips thanks Greg and John for their work.

Councilor Pellitter commented that an employee survey would be useful to determine need. She also suggests a downtown worker informational campaign to explore different modes of transportation to work.

Councilor Bullett agreed there is work to be done to subsidize public transit. She also expressed the need for employers to fund parking for their employees.

Councilor Bullett suggested adding questions to the survey asking employees which factors make it feel unsafe to walk to your car at night, so that the City can improve those barriers if possible.

Motion to Adjournment

The motion was moved by Councilor Pellittier, and seconded by Councilor Bullett.

The motion was accepted unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned