

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** March 14, 2022

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## **Greater Portland METRO Awarded \$1.9 million in Federal Funding to Replace BREEZ Buses.**

(Portland, Maine) – Greater Portland Transit District (METRO) has been awarded \$1,887,000 by the US Department of Transportation in federal discretionary funding to fund 85% of the cost to replace and upgrade four (4) existing METRO BREEZ shuttles.<sup>1</sup> The existing smaller shuttles will be replaced with larger buses that have greater passenger capacity, more room for bikes and people using mobility devices, a longer useful life, and can be operated on all METRO’s routes.

METRO is grateful for the support provided by Senator Susan Collins, Senator Angus King, and US Representative Chellie Pingree, as well as Maine’s Department of Transportation and numerous municipalities and agencies.

“Using public transportation is an increasingly affordable way of travelling, is much safer than driving, and helps slow climate change,” said METRO Board President and Falmouth Town Councilor, Hope Cahan. “Upgrading the BREEZ buses will improve the passenger experience and is another step toward making transit a wise choice for travel along the busy I-295/Route 1 corridor between Brunswick and Portland.”

The BREEZ provides inter-city express transit service between Brunswick, Freeport, Yarmouth and Portland, and connects to the larger METRO transit system as well as to the Amtrak Downeaster, and partner bus agencies. The service demonstrated strong performance by year 3 of its pilot phase (2019) with annual ridership that year totaling 73,461 and exceeding projections by over 60%. The strong performance of the BREEZ prompted the towns of Brunswick, Freeport and Yarmouth to make a long-term commitment to public transit and join Falmouth, Portland and Westbrook as full members of METRO.

METRO is hopeful that the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) will approve federal *American Rescue Plan Act* (ARPA) funding to support proposed service improvements on the BREEZ as well as for a wide range of proposed regional transit improvements sponsored by many of the region’s transit agencies. “Alongside the upgraded BREEZ buses, boosting the region’s transit system will help us recover ridership lost during the pandemic,” said METRO Executive Director, Greg Jordan. “Shorter wait times, better bus stops, new destinations, a temporary fare cut, and a series of customer focused innovations will help us meet the mobility needs of tomorrow.”

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<sup>1</sup> [Fiscal Year 2021 Buses and Bus Facilities Projects | FTA \(dot.gov\)](https://www.fta.dot.gov/funding-programs/infrastructure-investments/funding-projects)

The region's long-range public transportation plan, [\*Transit Tomorrow\*](#), was completed by PACTS in 2020. Among other major goals, the plan identifies Route 1 between Biddeford and Brunswick as a potential future rapid transit corridor. The BREEZ bus upgrade, followed by potential service level improvements under consideration by PACTS, is another step toward making transit a real choice for travel along the Route 1/I-295 corridor.

The replacement BREEZ buses will use diesel fuel but the vehicles will include the latest emissions control technology helping to minimize the impact on local air quality. Later this spring, METRO will introduce its first two (2) Battery Electric Buses. These buses represent the agency's first step toward achieving the goal of a zero-emissions fleet by 2040. Over the next year, METRO will evaluate the performance of these buses and the supporting battery technology in Maine's cold climate. The results will help the agency build its technical capacity and plan an effective transition to a zero emissions fleet over the next 15 years.

Greater Portland METRO provides public transportation for the municipalities of Brunswick, Falmouth, Freeport, Gorham, Portland, South Portland, Westbrook, and Yarmouth with connections to Casco Bay Lines, Amtrak Downeaster, Portland Jetport, and partner regional bus services.