



## MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

### Portland Peninsula Route Redevelopment Task Force

Thursday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019 from 2-4pm

Portland Regional Chamber, 443 Congress Street, Portland

#### 1. Call Meeting to Order

Belinda Ray, METRO Board President and Task Force Chair, called the meeting to order and welcomed members of the Task Force.

#### 2. Welcome and Introductions

Task Force members introduced themselves and shared their interest in public transit on the Peninsula. The following members were present:

- Belinda Ray, METRO Board President, Task Force Chair
- Jeff Levine, City of Portland
- Art Handman, South Portland Bus Service
- Hank Berg, Casco Bay Ferry Lines
- Kerrie Keller, United Way of Greater Portland
- Tyler Plante, Portland Housing Authority
- Patricia Quinn, Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA)
- Quincy Hentzel, Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Jaime Parker, Portland Trails
- Nicole Anderson, Opportunity Alliance
- Amy Geren, Portland Downtown
- Ed Suslovic, METRO Board Member
- Denise Beck, METRO
- Greg Jordan, METRO
- Rick Harbison, GPCOG – project consultant
- Zoe Miller, GPCOG – project consultant

#### 3. Purpose and Charge of Task Force

Belinda reviewed the purpose and charge of the Task Force. The group will be meeting monthly throughout the course of the project (except for a summer hiatus in July and August) and will provide feedback, guidance, and local expertise to the project team. In lieu of not meeting this summer, Task Force members may be asked to contribute to the project in other ways (promoting surveys, participating in outreach, providing feedback over email, etc.).

#### 4. Background and Overview of METRO Peninsula Route

Greg Jordan, General Manager of METRO, provided an overview of the factors leading to this route redesign and outlined current transit and transportation options on the



Portland Peninsula. (See attached PowerPoint). The project's primary goals are to improve mobility on the peninsula and in the region, and to reduce automobile dependency. Greg views this effort as an opportunity to look at the Peninsula with a clean slate and an eye towards making all routes simpler, more direct, and easier to use.

Specific objectives include designing a new circulator system that would potentially combine Route 1 and Route 8; turning Congress St. into a high frequency transit corridor (15 min. service) by interlining Route 5 and Route 7; and providing more service to the Eastern Waterfront by extending certain routes. Greg also expressed a willingness for this project to remain open to innovations in technology and mobility (i.e., autonomous transit, mobility as a service, partnering with Uber or Lyft, etc.) that might provide additional service on the Peninsula or address specific needs.

Greg described the major challenges with Route 8. Primarily that it was designed 20-30 years ago and has not been changed, it only operates in one direction, and it goes in every nook and cranny of the Peninsula. For a circulator to be successful, Greg believes it would need to have a high frequency (ideally 15 min) so it would be quicker than walking, be bi-directional, have a less circuitous route, and use smaller buses. Other considerations would be unique branding so it pops out, and relatedly, whether the Circulator should be part of the new fare policy or free (the benefits of spurring ridership in downtown could outweigh lost fare revenue).

Greg asked the group if the project is missing anything as a focus. Task Force members noted the following:

- Alleviating parking demand on the Peninsula is an important consideration as well as anything that can contribute towards reducing vehicle traffic to the islands.
- Improving the user experience.
- The mobility objective (as shown in the PowerPoint) could be broken down a little more to be more specific (ex. supporting work force mobility and/or other objectives).
- One possibility is using USM's parking garage in the off months of summer for island residents to park their cars. Service to and from the garage would have to be exceptional for it to be convenient.
- The Jetport should be included as one of the nodes when thinking about connectivity on the Peninsula.

One member asked about Commercial St. and whether it would be part of a proposed circulator since it is arguably the most trafficked street in the summer and has no transit service. Greg responded that METRO is engaged in the PACTS study on Commercial St. and hoping to get transit service on Commercial St. that is workable.



Greg then reviewed the project's timeline with the group. The first initial deadline to meet is this fall in order for METRO to submit a PACTS funding request. Greg is also hoping there will be some local business support and sponsoring opportunities associated with the redesign. METRO will also want to have conversations with the City to identify any potential impacts to the City's 2021-2022 budget.

##### **5. Review Proposed Approach for Public and Stakeholder Engagement**

Zoe Miller of GPCOG, METRO's project consultant, reviewed the proposed approach and methods for gathering public and stakeholder input (see attached PowerPoint and handout) and requested feedback from members of the Task Force.

Zoe explained that for the purposes of this project the "public" is anyone not affiliated with an organization, while "stakeholders" are staff and leadership at key businesses and organizations. The project team will be looking to the Task Force to bring their expertise of the community, and to serve as connectors to bring more people to events and drive overall participation.

One Task Force member noted that it will be important to understand who METRO is serving and why. For instance, if most people are using the Route 8 to get to the grocery store a more direct circulator might be problematic for someone who must walk seven blocks with bags of groceries. Another member mentioned that pedestrian connections to the route will be very important, especially if it is more direct with less stops.

Greg responded that Route 8 has a dedicated ridership base and METRO will need to take their needs into account to not create a situation where someone cannot get to the supermarket.

Several Task Force members mentioned that many people asked to give input will not have any experience with METRO or transit on the Peninsula in general. It was suggested the project team develop two types of questions – one set for veteran METRO users, and another set for those who never use METRO. For people who do not use METRO, we would want to understand why not, what the barrier is, and what specific opportunities would help them take the bus in lieu of driving.

One Task Force member noted that the outreach process could potentially exclude tourists and visitors and so the project team should try to get input from them in the summer months. One or more meetings out on the islands would be important.



Zoe placed flipchart sheets around the room with prompts and asked Task Force members to contribute ideas. The following input was given.

Bus stops and other locations for brief interviews:

- Train station/Portland Transportation Center
- Hannaford
- Elm Street and Congress
- Casco Bay High School
- Portland Food Co-op
- Maine Mall
- Cruise ship dock
- Concord Coach
- Greyhound
- Tony's Donuts
- Holy Donut
- Harbor Terrace Apartments (284 Danforth Street)
- Franklin Towers
- Ferry terminal
- Jetport
- Monument Square/Library
- Eastern Waterfront (Fore/Middle/India)

Community Events (and your name if you can help connect us for outreach):

- First Friday Artwalk, Congress Square Park Weekly events, Old Port Fest (Amy Geren)
- Sea Dogs (outside before game)
- Farmers Markets
- School-related events (Jeff Levine)
- Deering Oaks summer events (Shakespeare in the Park, Festival of Nations)
- Island meeting on Peaks
- Portland Housing Authority community meetings
- Neighborhood meetings

Stakeholders (organizations, businesses, institutions):

- Frontline hospitality staff (i.e., front desk staff at hotels – Visit Portland could help us connect)
- Transportation hub staff (PTC and Casco Bay Lines terminal)
- Higher ed – USM, UNE, MECA
- Nonprofit service providers – Amistad, Preble Street, Iris Network, etc.
- Neighborhood Associations – Bayside, East Bayside, Parkside, Libbytown
- Portland Public Library
- Downtown merchants
- Thompson's Point
- Maine Medical Center
- Mercy
- Wex
- Covetrus/Vets Choice
- High Schools
- Portland Housing Authority staff at Harbor Terrace, 100 State Street, East Bayside, Franklin Towers
- Portland Adult Education
- YMCA
- Avesta
- Island communities



Catchy name for the planning process:

- METRO Peninsula Revamp
- METRO Peninsula Reboot
- METRO Peninsula Simplification
- METRO Peninsula 2.0
- Let's Go METRO
- The METRO Tempo

**6. Public Comment**

No public comment received.

**7. Next Steps**

Zoe will schedule a meeting in June. The project team will send out the PowerPoint to the Task Force along with meeting highlights and any other meeting materials.

**8. Adjourn**

Belinda thanked everyone for their participation and closed the meeting.