



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** March 18, 2020

## **Southern Maine Regional Transit Agencies Take Steps to Improve Protections Against COVID-19 for Transit Workers and Passengers**

(PORTLAND, Maine) – In response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, Greater Portland METRO, Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach Transit (BSOOB), South Portland Bus Service, and the Regional Transportation Program (RTP) are working together to provide essential public transportation needs for the region while helping to slow the spread of COVID-19.

### **Transit Agency Service Updates:**

- Suspension of Transit Fares on Greater Portland METRO, Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach Transit, South Portland Bus Service, and Regional Transportation Program (RTP).
- Service reductions on METRO, Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach Transit, and RTP.
- Encourage riders to use public transit only when absolutely necessary and never when sick.
- Launch of automated fare payment system delayed.

**Greater Portland METRO, BSOOB Transit, South Portland Bus Service, and RTP will suspend all transit fares indefinitely beginning Friday, March 20.** This move makes service free for all riders and is being taken to eliminate the cross-handling of cash and paper media between bus operators and riders and maximize social distancing. Fares may be reinstated at any time as conditions warrant, so passengers are advised to routinely check agency web sites for updated information.

**Greater Portland METRO and BSOOB Transit will implement transit service reductions beginning Friday, March 20 for an indefinite period.**

- All METRO routes will operate a “Saturday” schedule on Weekdays (Monday-Friday). Service on Saturdays and Sundays will operate according to regular schedules for those days. METRO’s Transit Center at Elm Street and Congress Street (“the Pulse”) and office at 114 Valley Street will be closed to the public.
- All Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach local routes and Portland Intercity connector will run Monday through Saturday and end at 6:30pm. There will be no service on Sundays. Zoom Turnpike Express service to Portland’s peninsula will remain unchanged. Saco Transportation Center will be closed to the public until further notice.



- **South Portland Bus Service** will initially maintain regular weekday bus service provided there are sufficient drivers to operate the service.
- **Regional Transportation Program (RTP)** is currently operating its demand/response service at a substantially reduced level.

These proactive measures are being taken in order to help protect bus operators and allow transit agencies to absorb anticipated staffing shortages due to the virus while maintaining clear and reliable service schedules.

Due to ridership declines of greater than 50%, METRO and BSOOB do not anticipate passenger crowding on buses. Transit services operated by these two agencies may be further reduced or reinstated as conditions warrant. Passengers are advised to routinely check agency web sites for updated information.

**Transit Agencies strongly encourage riders to use public transit only when absolutely necessary and never when sick.** “The region’s public transit agencies are working very hard to maintain transit service so people can travel for the most critical needs including grocery shopping, pharmacy visits, non-emergency medical needs, critical job access, and to assist family members.” METRO General Manager Greg Jordan said. “We are asking riders to help Maine and the country slow the spread of COVID-19, and avoid using public transit when sick and for unnecessary trips.”

**METRO, BSOOB Transit and the City of South Portland are indefinitely delaying implementation of the planned April 1 fare increase and activation of the new Automated Fare Payment System.** The system features contactless payment options that allow passengers to pay with a tap of their smartcard or scan of their smartphone and a new e-discounting method called “fare-capping.” A new implementation date is not determined, but the delay of the new fare system will allow time for the community outreach needed to effectively educate our riders on how to use the new mobile app and smartcards for the new system. When we are past this crisis, we will get back to advancing our transit system.

**Additional information and remarks:**

- **Greater Portland METRO – GPMETRO.ORG | 207-774-0351**  
General Manager – Greg Jordan | [gjordan@gpmetro.org](mailto:gjordan@gpmetro.org) | 207-517-3025
  - [facebook.com/METROBUSGreaterPortland](https://www.facebook.com/METROBUSGreaterPortland)
  - [Instagram.com/metrogreaterportlandtransit](https://www.instagram.com/metrogreaterportlandtransit)

- **Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach Transit – BSOOBTransit.org | 207-282-5408**  
**Executive Director – Tony Scavuzzo | tscavuzzo@bsoobtransit.org | 207-283-3645**  
**Quote from Tony Scavuzzo** “Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach Transit will reduce service in this time of uncertainty to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic situation in a manner that is civically responsible. An emergency transit committee meeting was called and all changes in service were approved. Maintaining a reduced level of service will continue to support essential workforce transportation, access to shopping and avenues to medical appointments. Our outstanding staff members will also be protected due to the minimized exposure this will create. Suspension of fares will further reduce contact with cash and fare media, promote social distancing while boarding and provide economic relief to ridership. The entire Biddeford Saco Old Orchard Beach Transit family continues to take every measure to keep our employees and passengers as safe as possible while ensuring ridership has a local, transportation based life line for their needs. Members of the public should monitor our website at [www.BSOOBTransit.org](http://www.BSOOBTransit.org) and our automated vehicle locator web application at [Transit.UniteGPS.com/BSOOB](http://Transit.UniteGPS.com/BSOOB). Our general information number is 207-282-5408.”
- **South Portland Bus Service - southportland.org/departments/bus-transportation/**  
**Director – Art Handman | ahandman@southportland.org | 207-767-5556**  
“South Portland Bus Service will initially maintain regular weekday bus service provided there are sufficient drivers to operate the service. Notice will be given on the Bus Service’s web site and the telephone information number (207-767-5556) if any service curtails are to be implemented.”
- **Regional Transportation Program (RTP) - rtprides.org/**  
**Executive Director – Jack De Beradinis | jackd@rtprides.org | 207-774-2666, ext 7513**  
“If the agency decides to close its office or suspend service, a notice will be placed on their website, face book page, and announced to local media. Effective March 21, RTP will end its Saturday service at 1 PM and cancel service on Sundays. Effective March 23, RTP will run the Lakes Region Explorer for the first three round trips each weekday from Bridgton to Portland, but cancel the last evening run departing Bridgton at 7:10 PM and returning from Portland at 8:45 PM. RTP will keep the public updated on future changes to its service.”