

Chapter 12: Public Participation

This chapter describes efforts to obtain comments and suggestions from York County community members. It presents notes from a series of Advisory Committee meetings held to obtain input and guidance from local stakeholders as the plan was developed. And it provides a brief report on two public workshops held to discuss issues addressed in this alternative transportation planning effort.

12.1 Advisory Committee Meetings

The Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission assembled a group of local stakeholders to serve on an Advisory Committee to provide oversight and direction for this York County transit study. The committee included representatives from York County Community Action Corporation, the Wells Chamber of Commerce, the Kennebunk-Kennebunkport Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Yorks Chamber of Commerce, the town of Wells, local trolley bus operators, the Maine Turnpike Authority, the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, and the Maine Department of Transportation.

Representatives of the Kennebunk-Kennebunkport Chamber of Commerce, the York Trolley Company, the Ogunquit Trolley Company, and In Town Trolley also participated in the planning process. Meetings were held at the Wells town office at various stages of the project.

January 14, 2004

At this introductory meeting, the committee reviewed the scope of work for the project and shared with the consultant their expectations for the transit study. One member suggested that the study should result in a region-wide car-free transportation program that will appeal to residents and vacationers. She cited the Island Explorer project in the Acadia region as the type of program she would like to see in coastal York County.

In response to questions from the consultant, committee members discussed destinations, activities, and travel patterns for residents and visitors during the summer tourist season. In addition to area beaches, they identified two very popular destinations – Dock Square in Kennebunkport and Perkins Cove in Ogunquit. Both locations feature shops, galleries, and restaurants, as well as scenic harbors and access to various ocean excursions. Parking at both of these locations is very limited.

Perkins Cove is served by the Ogunquit Trolley, but has no transit link with York Beach. Dock Square is served by the In Town Trolley, but has no transit links with Wells or downtown Kennebunk.

March 3, 2004

The committee reviewed two background chapters prepared by the consultant. The first described existing transit services in the coastal York County region. The second described transit strategies developed in vacation communities elsewhere in Maine, Cape Cod, Delaware, and Vermont.

The group then participated in an in-depth discussion of market segments and travel patterns. Topics discussed included visitor travel modes, lodging patterns, visitor destinations and activities, and workforce transportation needs. The committee agreed that the transit study should focus its attention on transportation alternatives for York, Ogunquit, Wells, Kennebunk, Kennebunkport, and Sanford. While they acknowledged a need to address possible transit links for Kittery and Seacoast New Hampshire, they agreed that this needs to be a topic for a separate study.

April 28, 2004

The committee reviewed a draft chapter that describes market groups and transportation needs for different market segments. The group also reviewed an analysis of Amtrak Downeaster usage and NNEPRA marketing strategies provided by KKO and Associates.

The group went on to discuss various alternative transit routes and services identified by the consultants. Much of the discussion focused on ways to improve the Wells Trolley and on alternative strategies for linking Wells with Kennebunk Lower Village and Dock Square. The group found merit in the consultant's suggestion that the transfer site for the Wells and Ogunquit Trolleys be moved to a location adjacent to the Wells Chamber of Commerce office. They asked the consultant to provide supporting documentation of this idea for use by trolley operators in their discussions with the two municipalities.

The consultant suggested that the Wells Trolley route suffered from infrequent service and unpredictable travel times. He suggested that his situation could be addressed by adding equipment to maintain service frequency during busy periods, or by limiting service frequency and following a published timetable. Committee members expressed a preference for increasing the frequency of Wells Trolley service, while recognizing that this approach would be more expensive.

The group discussed the idea of adding a transit link from Wells to either Kennebunk Lower Village or Dock Square. Committee members agreed that a route linking Wells and Kennebunk should terminate in the Lower Village to avoid congestion-related traffic delays in and around Dock Square.

The committee also discussed the idea of offering a reservation-only shuttle service to area hotels for vacationers who arrive at the Wells Transportation Center on the *Downeaster* Amtrak train.

May 26, 2004

The Advisory Committee reviewed a draft service design chapter that identified a range of public transportation alternatives. Much of the discussion focused on strategies for linking Wells and Kennebunk. Committee members expressed skepticism about the consultant's suggestion that a Wells-Kennebunk transit link could be routed via Laudholm Preserve. While they recognized nature walks as a potential activity for shuttle riders, they felt that diverting shuttles to Laudholm Farm would prove to be too time-consuming and expensive for the limited ridership that would result.

The Kennebunk-Kennebunkport Chamber of Commerce director expressed strong interest in the idea of linking downtown Kennebunk with the Lower Village and Kennebunk beach. He acknowledged that this route had less ridership potential than a Wells-Lower Village link, and that shuttles to and from downtown Kennebunk should probably be less frequent than shuttles between the Lower Village and Wells.

The group also discussed the location, format, and schedule for public workshops to discuss alternative transit strategies for the region. They agreed that two evening workshops should be scheduled in late June, with one workshop to be held in Wells and the other in downtown Kennebunk.

July 28, 2004

The committee discussed the results of public workshops held in late June. They also reviewed draft chapters addressing management alternatives and possible technology strategies, along with a revised service design chapter that incorporated suggestions from the May 26 Advisory Committee meeting.

The group considered preliminary cost and revenue estimates presented by the consultant, along with initial marketing ideas. The group then began to discuss possible bus stop and pedestrian improvements. The Kennebunk-Kennebunkport Chamber of Commerce director suggested that MDOT, the town of Kennebunk, and the local Chamber of Commerce might be able to work together to develop a transit hub in Kennebunk Lower Village. He suggested that such a facility could combine a transfer site and passenger waiting area with public restrooms and visitor information. The consultant agreed to meet with the Chamber director following the meeting to inspect possible transit hub sites in the Lower Village.

October 6, 2004

The Advisory Committee reviewed and discussed a number of draft marketing materials, including a cover and centerfold for a full-color tabloid publication. The consultant also presented draft posters and display ads designed to promote the *Downeaster* hotel shuttle.

The group expressed initial agreement with names suggested by the consultants, including *Atlantic Shore Line* as the overall identity for the publicly funded transit program. Individual route names included *Shore Line Trolley* for the extended Wells Trolley, *Shore Road Shuttle* for the York-Perkins Cove link, and *Sanford Ocean Shuttle* for Sanford-Wells year round service.

The consultants reported that they are still working on graphic concepts for an *Atlantic Shore Line* logo, vehicle paint scheme, and bus stop sign.

The committee reviewed and discussed updated cost and revenue projections for each of the proposed service components. And the consultants shared with the committee a list of bus stop locations and issues that they expect to address in a later chapter.

December 8, 2004

The Advisory Committee met to review the consultant's Draft Final Report. The owner of the Ogunquit Trolley Company questioned whether it was advisable to extend the Shore Road Shuttle all the way into Perkins Cove because of summertime congestion. He suggested that a new shuttle from York should use a transfer site located just outside of Perkins Cove. The consultant will modify the service plan chapter accordingly.

There was considerable discussion about region-wide passes and reduced-fare transfers between bus lines. The consultant agreed to include in the final report an expanded discussion of possible transfer strategies. The consultant will also make suggested adjustments to the mix of municipal and business support for some of the proposed services.

Advisory Committee members agreed that they should continue to work together to implement the ideas developed during the course of this planning project. Representatives from the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission and the Maine Department of Transportation will set up a framework for the continued participation of committee members after the completion of this study, which is scheduled to end on December 31, 2004.

12.2 Public Workshops

Public workshops were held in late June of 2004 to inform members of the public about progress on the transit study, and to obtain comments and ideas from community members. The first workshop took place on June 28 at the public high school in Wells. The second took place on June 29 in a meeting room at the town office in downtown Kennebunk.

The Wells meeting was well attended by project stakeholders, most of whom also serve on the project Advisory Committee. The workshop was attended by only one additional member of the public, an individual who owns two private gift shops in the region. The Kennebunk workshop attracted a few more community members, including a representative of the Seashore Trolley Museum, a town employee who develops programs for Kennebunk youth, a member of Ogunquit's parking committee, and a handful of other individuals who are interested in the project.

The consultant began each workshop with a review of overall goals for the transit program. These included:

- Reduce seasonal traffic congestion
- Preserve and enhance existing trolley services
- Provide a car-free link for Amtrak travelers
- Increase convenience for visitors with cars
- Increase mobility for residents and workers
- Enhance the region as a visitor destination
- Facilitate commerce without congestion

The consultant then presented an overview of project tasks and a summary of service concepts currently under consideration by the Advisory Committee and the consulting team. He asked for comments on a number of possible topics, including:

- Positive or negative experiences with existing transit services
- Suggested changes in existing services
- Community transportation needs
- Ideas for new services
- Related transportation and parking issues

A local business owner who attended the Wells meeting said that there was a clear need for alternative transportation access to downtown Kennebunk and Kennebunk Lower Village. She cited the lack of available parking as a serious limitation on business growth in the Lower Village.

A youth services staff member for the town of Kennebunk said she has been waiting for years for some kind of transportation link between downtown Kennebunk and Kennebunk Beach. She said there is not enough parking at the beach to accommodate

residents with parking stickers. She cited a particular need for transportation to allow area young people to travel to jobs and recreational activities in the community.

The representative from the Ogunquit parking committee asked about plans to develop parking facilities for vacationers and residents along the routes of the various trolley services. He said that park and ride lots are needed to allow more people to take advantage of transportation alternatives. He asked whether shuttles would include space to accommodate beach chairs and other gear. He suggested that shuttles might be able to transport people to and from regional playhouses. And he stressed the importance of public education and marketing to get people to take advantage of shuttle alternatives.

The representative of the Seashore Trolley Museum noted that there is a public transportation “service void” between Biddeford and Wells. He said that the trolley museum would love to have a shuttle service that included a stop at their facility.

Other topics discussed at the workshop included the need for bicycle racks and the possible benefits of low-cost commuter passes for workers and local employers.

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