

Meeting of the Ridership Committee – via Zoom
Minutes of the GP Metro Ridership Committee meeting of
Thursday, April 21, 2022 at 4:00 p.m. via Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81257398178?pwd=d0ZUNUNEYzNWSFpuZzNvaW1lOHNsUT09>

Webinar ID: 812 5739 8178 | Passcode 705524 |

Phone: (646) 558-8656 | Telephone participants: *9 to raise hand, *6 to unmute

<p>Committee Members Present: Pious Ali - Acting Chair John Thompson Jeff Levine Andrew Zarro</p> <p>Committee Members Absent: Ed Suslovic, Chair Hope Cahan Merrill Barter</p> <p>Non-Committee Board Members present: Bill Rixon</p>	<p>Staff and Others Present: Greg Jordan, Executive Director Mike Tremblay, Transit Development Director Lauren Shaw, Executive Assistant</p> <p>Public: Kim True, Freeport</p>
---	---

An attendance role call was taken by Lauren Shaw, Executive Assistant

1. With a quorum in place, the meeting was called to order at 4:06 p.m. by Pious Ali, Acting Chair.

2. Public Comment:

Kim True, Freeport – with Freeport Community Action Group and working with the non-carbon fuel group (get right name). Looking to have people use the Breez to commute into Portland and back. Looking to have first time users of the service and UMO app to have access to a how-to video on how to ride. Now that the mask mandate has been released, when will that video be available? This will help ridership develop and the currently reduced rate will also help with budgets.

Mike Tremblay: the mask mandate was lifted yesterday. The Veranda St. project has kept staff very busy the past few weeks, but contact videographer Metro works with about creating a video, which can be applied to the whole network as an update/refresher on how to ride and use the fare payment system. Reduced fare on Breez ends 5/7/22, but are planning to have a reduced fare promotion during the summer, pending funding, that people can take advantage of.

3. Approval of March 17, 2022 Ridership Committee Meeting Minutes.

Motion made by John Thompson, seconded by Andrew Zarro, to approve the minutes from the March 17, 2022 Ridership Committee meeting as written. A roll call vote was taken by Pious Ali, Vice Chair. With approval by Jeff Levine, Andrew Zarro, John Thompson, Bill Rixon, and Pious Ali, **the motion passed unanimously by all those present**

4. Ridership, Fare Revenue, and Service Update

- March ridership was up to 62% of 2019 figures; the increase is slow, but continues. For the most part, Ridership was not affected by the reduced Route 1 and Breez schedules that began late in March. It may affect April numbers more. Our goal is to return to 2019 levels by late 2023. There is funding to help offset lower fare revenue through 2023, beyond that it will affect the budget.
- The average fare revenue is slightly less than usual, but within expected fluctuations at 38% of 2019.
- The theme for Metro’s service improvement program this year is, “Together We Ride,” and will be incorporated into the Metro logo. An alternate logo will be developed for electric bus-related news.

5. Summer Service Updates – Effective May 8, 2022

- Husky Line will revert to summer service – frequency will change from 30 minutes to 45 minutes.
- Restore normal service on Route 1 and Breez 5/8/22.
- Reduce Route 3 weekday headways to 45 minutes, breaking the typical Route 3/5 interline. Sometimes the two will connect with continuous service and other times passengers will disembark at the Maine Mall and board a new bus to continue.
- Route Productivity March 2022 weekdays: Route 3 has the lowest productivity in our network. The Breez has lower ridership as well, but it is a longer route and typically increases during the summer.
- Pre-pandemic, there were capacity issues with the smaller Breez buses. Metro puts on a second bus or sends out a larger bus if needed. Sometime next year, 35’ buses will go into service on the Breez route and, if demand is spiking, an increase in route frequency will be considered.
- A reduced fare promotion will be implemented, likely on all routes, when ARPA funds are released.

Kim True, Freeport – is hearing here a two-pronged approach to increase ridership and availability of ARPPA funds. Has any thought been given to doing free ridership for a time period to increase ridership to encourage first time riders to use the bus – at least on the Breez, if not on all routes?

Mike Tremblay has seen these efforts throughout the country, but, often, they are larger agencies. Metro did not propose free as it is difficult to reconcile fares with inter-agency travel/transfers and the concern that people might hop on a bus just to get out of the sun or the rain. The coalition of agencies has decided to enforce not allowing people to ride the buses all day because they have nowhere else to go.

Bill Rixon: What is the possibility of getting several dozen free passes and have temporary, limited programs in the towns serviced by the Breez? Glenn and the Customer Service Manager will work with towns on this question. Metro’s “How to Ride” materials also need to be updated.

6. Accommodations for Asylum Seekers

Since January 2022, Metro has been receiving inquiries as to how we may be able to accommodate asylum seekers who have been placed in hotels along Route 1 in Freeport (and eventually Yarmouth). While Route 1 is served by Metro’s BREEZ service, the specific locations in question are not well suited for the BREEZ to serve them directly.

Metro staff has been working with Portland General Assistance and a consultant hired by Cumberland County, Zoe Miller, to identify a workable solution. The tentative plan would be for RTP Rides to provide a shuttle service, Tuesday and Thursdays, to connect the hotels with local shopping and regional transit connections. This shuttle service would connect to the Yarmouth Hannaford supermarket, which is a Metro BREEZ stop, as well as the Walmart in Falmouth to connect to the Metro Route 7 service.

This service could be funded by Portland General Assistance (GA) and Cumberland County ARPA funds for about two months, and then partnerships will be sought to extend the program. Metro will not be directly involved in the shuttle program, but will aid with coordination and communication as needed. Additionally, Metro staff, working with our partners in South Portland and BSOOB Transit, will provide Portland GA access to a pass program allowing asylum seekers to ride buses in the DiriGo network for free, paid for by Portland GA. The RTP shuttle service would also be free.

Kim True, Freeport, asked for clarification on the proposed plan. What about using the smaller metro Breez bus to go into one of the lodging locations, where people can congregate to get the bus. It is a smaller hazard than having people walk along Route 1 or having a large bus try to maneuver with the conditions noted above. We have a bus system and, for the first time, have a large population (140-150 people) who need transportation, and with ARPA funding, have an opportunity to increase ridership. Metro Breez should try to work harder to provide this service.

7. Community Transportation Leaders & Ride with Me Summary

The Community Transportation Leaders (CTL, a group of transit users and advocates intended to advance the inclusion of underrepresented communities, including older adults, people with disabilities, and people of color, presented to the Metro Ridership Committee in March 2022. They also made presentations to GPCOG's Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) and other public settings. Presentations are being summarized by GPCOG, but are not yet published.

Ride With Me, a recent GPCOG initiative, pairs regional decision-makers with transit users. Metro's Hope Cahan, Mike Tremblay, and Tom Ridge, participated. Rider recommendations made these interactions were very similar to those made by CTL, including improved: driver-customer interactions; bus stop accessibility; hours of operation and frequency; and additional language support. The CTL Cohort 2 Transportation Concerns & Solutions Summary (April 2022), has been attached to these minutes.

8. Future Agenda Items

- CTL Presentation Needs/Follow-up (Added 4/21/22)
- Update on ARPA Proposals (Added 4/21/22)
- PACTS Projects: Transit Tomorrow/Transit Together/Rapid Transit Study (Ongoing)
- Performance Metrics/Benchmarks (2022)
- Bus Stop Improvement Project (2022)
- Metro & Regional Transit Marketing (2022)
- Rock Row Transit Service Development (2022)
- Metro Strategic Plan (2022)
- Proposed UNE Medical Center (2022)
- Partnering with bicycling entities, including Portland's proposed bicycle sharing program

9. Upcoming Meetings

- Finance Committee – April 27, 2022 at 4:00 p.m.
- Board of Directors – April 28, 2022 at 4:00 p.m.
- Executive Committee – May 11, 2022 at 3:30 p.m.
- Ridership Committee – May 19, 2022 at 4:00 p.m.

10. Adjournment

Motion made by John Thompson, seconded by Andrew Zarro, to adjourn. A roll call vote was taken by Pious Ali, Vice Chair. With approval by Jeff Levine, Andrew Zarro, John Thompson, Bill Rixon, and Pious Ali, **the motion passed unanimously by all those present and the meeting adjourned at 5:16 p.m.**