

ATRC Virtual Public Meeting/Lewiston-Auburn Transit Study

June 23, 2021

6:00-7:30 pm

NOTE: To see full meeting PowerPoint presentation, click [here](#).

Panelists: Jennifer Williams, ATRC; Jill Cahoon, AECOM; Carol Morris, Morris Communications/Moderator

Contributors: Sandy Buchanan, WMTS; Krystal Oldread, AECOM

Participants: 16

Meeting Introduction

- Jennifer Williams welcomed attendees and explained the purpose of the study: to improve transit in the Lewiston-Auburn/Lisbon region. She added that tonight's meeting was the second of two, and would give the public the opportunity to comment on recommendations for route and service changes.
- Carol Morris explained logistics of the online meeting and told attendees that there would be several pauses in the presentation to give people a chance to ask clarifying questions, with plenty of time for comments at the end. She then turned the meeting over to Jill to begin the presentation.

Second Survey Results

- A second online survey received 45 responses, and indicated that 84% of respondents used citylink, and 68% would be affected by the proposed changes.

Service Recommendations

- Jill summarized the proposed improvements, noting the goals were to simplify schedules and create streamlined, faster routes.
- These goals were achieved by:
 - Converting less-used fixed route segments to demand response service
 - Adding a third hub at Walmart, with multiple routes connecting the proposed three hubs (Lewiston and Auburn Stations in the downtowns and Walmart)
 - Increasing the number of one-seat (non-transfer) rides from the Great Falls and Oak St. Stations to Walmart
 - Two-way service to the Auburn Hannaford via Spring St. from Great Falls Station and New Auburn
 - New service along East Ave. (Lewiston) and Center St. (Auburn)
 - Two-way service along Lisbon St. and Pleasant St.
 - 30-minute service to Lewiston Shaw's

- The plan also includes adding same-day demand response service in expanded demand response zones, with free transfers to fixed-route service. This recommendation means no area has transit service removed.
- In Lisbon, the proposal is to maintain the existing route but convert it to “open door” once outside of the citylink service area (people can signal to get off/on all along the route) to add more flexibility for riders. Making a connection to the new Blue Line run by Western Maine Transportation Services to be started this summer to Topsham, Brunswick and Bath is also in the plan. This Lisbon Connection will be monitored over time to determine if it needs to be adjusted in any way.

Longer Term Recommendations

- Jill talked about longer term recommendations, noting that these are items that will require more funding, but that would make the system more useful and attract more riders. The list below is ranked in order of desirability as indicated by the first online survey:
 - Expand weekday hours to 8:00 PM, maintain 60-minute service
 - Sunday Bus Service 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM, every 120 minutes
 - Hourly Saturday Bus Service 9 AM to 5 PM
 - Enhance the same-day service to microtransit
 - New more convenient fare collection technology – cash-free type fares, etc.
 - Saturday Bus Service 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM, every 60 minutes, all Saturday routes
 - Sunday Bus Service 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM, every 60 minutes
 - Sunday Bus Service 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM, every 60 minutes
 - Expand demand response zones community wide where there is no fixed route service. 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM weekdays 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM Saturdays.
 - 30-minute service on all routes Weekdays 6:00 AM – 6:00 PM, 60 minutes after 6 PM
 - Provide 4 trips daily (weekdays) to and from Portland from LA
 - Provide 5 trips daily (weekdays) to and from Bath & Brunswick from LA
 - Provide 4 trips daily (weekdays) to and from Augusta from LA
 - Provide 2 trips daily (weekdays) to and from Rumford from LA
 - Re-evaluate Sabattus service needs
 - Re-evaluate Lisbon service

QUESTION: There was a question on the new fare collection technology? Jill responded that it should include cash-free options using card-based payment; Western Maine Transportation Services does have some options of this type (swipe or show a card) and part of the plan is to ensure that these can work for both systems. There is no timeframe for this as of yet.

Fares

- In order to keep service affordable, the fares for fixed route bus service will not change.
- The cost for demand response service will be \$1.50 if scheduled a day in advance, \$2 if scheduled same-day. Demand response service will include free transfers to the citylink fixed route system, and multi-trip discounted passes will be available and can be used for demand response in the same way as they are currently used for fixed route.

- Since many people have requested that a single fare system be used for other regional services (Western Maine Transportation Services, for example), this is a recommendation as well, and also that it should be made as simple as possible. This will take time to be implemented, likely a few years. Fare capping (automatically ensuring a customer is paying the lowest possible fare) will be a part of this upgrade.

QUESTION: *What is the waiting time for same-day service demand response?* Jill responded that it depends on time of day and availability of vehicles. But it would be no more than an hour – the same frequency as fixed route. As time goes on and the system is improved, the waiting time would be even less, as low as 20 minutes.

QUESTION: *Are you taking away monthly costs?* This question was interpreted to be about the monthly discounted passes, and Jill and Jen reiterated that those would still be available for the demand response service in the same way it is now available for fixed route service.

COMMENT: *Many people are on fixed incomes and having an Unlimited Pass is essential.* Yes, and that option will remain. No change.

Implementation Plan/Timing

- Jill indicated that citylink staff hopes to finalize the plan, assess the feasibility of starting a transit district, and find funding for capital assets this year. By fall of 2022, the schedule calls for finalizing new fixed route schedules and setting up technology for same day service. In spring of 2023, details would be communicated to the public, staff and drivers would be trained, and in fall of 2023, new stops would be available and the new service would launch. Jill noted that this is an optimistic schedule, and Jen emphasized that the city councils of Lewiston and Auburn first need to agree to move ahead with the recommendations.

Public Comment/Questions

In response to a question about the boundaries of the New Auburn Demand Response area, Jen noted that Broad, Mill and Main Sts. would have two-way fixed route service; and the rest of New Auburn would be served by demand response service. Jill outlined the area on the map that would be served by demand response and where it would connect to the hubs/fixed route network. She reminded everyone that demand response is open to the general public, and anyone can request trips

QUESTION: *Can you talk more about the new Blue Line from WMTS? Is it starting up this summer? Is that part of the implementation plan for this study?* Jill said the Blue Line is a separate improvement, and asked Sandy Buchanan from Western Maine Transportation Services to explain further. Sandy said the Blue Line has been running as a pilot program - on reduced capacity due to COVID last year - but service is now being increased. To do this, they need a bigger vehicle. Western Maine Transportation Services expects to expand it to three runs a day by the last week of July/first week of August depending on employee availability. The Blue Line stops at the Auburn and Lewiston bus stations, at both ends of Lisbon, at the Topsham Mall, then goes on to Bath where it is possible to transfer to the Brunswick Explorer.

QUESTION: *If the ADA area is absorbed by demand response areas, how does that affect ADA fares? How do these two things interact?* Jill responded that the ADA area would be revised based on streamlined fixed routes. ADA is available – with different regulations – within that area to people who qualify, and the fare would be the regular ADA fare. The demand response zones are open to general public at the \$1.50/\$2 fare noted earlier. Where there are areas of overlap in terms of service availability, it would be the choice of the individual to decide whether to take ADA paratransit or the general public demand response. Jill also stated that all current ADA registered passengers would be grandfathered in to the current citylink service area boundaries and only newly registered passengers would be subject to the new boundaries.

Carol asked when the written report would be available for those who want more details. Jen said the finalized report should be available on the citylink and ATRC websites at the end of July or August, and also the cities' websites if they choose to include it. There will be clear links to staff contacts for those who have questions or want to make further comment.

Jen also emphasized that there is at least a two-year implementation timeframe for the recommendations, and both city councils need to adopt them in order to move forward. She also said that before it is implemented, there will be another significant public process and education around specific route changes, etc., as they get closer to the launch date.

QUESTION: *How many demand respond vehicles would be needed and how much will they cost?* The response from Krystal Oldread, of AECOM, indicated that there will be two needed, and they will cost \$70-80,000 apiece. She noted that funding comes from federal and state sources as well as local, and Jill added that the local share is typically a fraction of the cost – around 20%. There is a savings with smaller vehicles because they are less expensive than larger vehicles. A participant commented that smaller vehicles have a shorter useful life than larger vehicles, which is true.

QUESTION: *How would a resident who lives on Cook Street get to Walmart?* The demand response service would take you to the nearest hub and the fixed route service would take you to Walmart. Or you could walk out to Mill Street, where you could catch either of the two buses that go along that street; both would take you to Walmart. One goes to Walmart via the Auburn hub and the other via the Lewiston hub.

QUESTION: *Can you talk a bit more about the transit district -- how it would work, be established, cost shared?* Jill explained that a transit district is a free-standing entity with an independent transit manager that requires buy-in by the communities that participate. A transit district has a board and the board determines level of service, fares, and the cost sharing formula. There are many different types of cost sharing formulas, but the important thing is that the communities setting up the district decide and negotiate a cost sharing formula that works for everyone. That formula is then formalized in the bylaws and the amounts that the communities provide is shared annually. Jen added that the make-up of the board is set based on the population within the participating communities. For example, if Lewiston and Auburn participated, Lewiston would have four seats on the board, and Auburn would have three. She noted that she believes it would be a lengthy but not insurmountable process for this to be finalized.

QUESTION: *So it would it be more costly for me to go to Walmart from Cook Street?* No, it would cost \$1.50 or \$2 for next day or same-day service, respectively. The fixed route cost does not change, nor does the cost of a monthly pass.

In closing, Jen noted that the biggest takeaway for people should be that there is no guarantee these recommendations will be implemented. She believes it is a great plan for the communities; next steps will take time and must be supported by city council members and others. The final report will be posted in late July or August and she said that people can email ATRC or citylink with comments and more questions. She thanked everyone very much for their participation on the call.

The meeting ended at 7 pm.