

TRANSIT PROPENSITY ANALYSIS SUMMARY

The Lewiston-Auburn project was commissioned by the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) and the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) to evaluate a possible expansion of passenger rail service to Lewiston-Auburn. Called the Lewiston-Auburn Passenger Rail Service Plan, the project was organized into two distinct evaluations: (1) transit propensity assessment (i.e., ridership estimation); and (2) corridor considerations and operating service evaluations.

The first analysis involved an assessment of potential ridership. A range of ridership estimates were developed by evaluating the demographics and travel patterns in the area, by considering the potential development opportunities of a rail connection and by examining similar rail corridors across the country. Overseeing the project was a nine-member Project Committee to represent the diverse views and regional perspectives, which included representatives from NNEPRA and MaineDOT, as well as representatives from the Cities of Lewiston and Auburn. The Project Committee met monthly and has been involved in evaluating the demand of passenger rail between L-A and Portland.

Traveling Markets

The potential for transit demand in this corridor could be drawn from two traveling markets:

- ▶ Diverting existing trips from driving to using passenger rail service; and
- ▶ Inducing demand through the introduction of a new passenger rail service between Lewiston-Auburn and Portland.

The evaluation focused on answering four questions:

- ▶ Where do people live, where do they work, how do they travel between Lewiston-Auburn and Portland, and how may they choose to travel if this service were available?
- ▶ How is the region's population, employment, and economic development growing?
- ▶ How do similar services across the country capture ridership?
- ▶ When asked specifically at the Public Open House events, how did the communities respond to whether they would ride a potential Lewiston-Auburn/Portland service?

Potential Service Options

The analysis was also based on the understanding that there are many factors that affect the size of a passenger rail travel market and the likelihood of travelers to use a passenger rail option. To that effect, diverting drivers to use transit would require a rail option that is time-competitive to driving and very easy to use. A convenient and well-performing service would be frequent; reasonably priced; easily accessible for both the origin and destination points; and comfortable.

On the contrary, a rail service that is infrequent, is significantly slower and notably more expensive than driving, or a service that does not provide convenient station access would result in lower ridership levels.

An "infrequent" service, typically a long-distance connection that operates a few trips per day, could still provide a valuable service within the region. The study, therefore, evaluated the market for a Lewiston-Auburn connection that aligns with the existing Downeaster, as well. A high-performing

infrequent service could still capture ridership if the service provides a direct (one-seat ride) connection or a well-coordinated connecting service in Portland with short dwell times. Poorly coordinated transfers in Portland, however, will limit the potential of rail to serve longer-distance intercity trips towards Boston.

Regional Growth Scenarios

Lastly, the ridership range included two growth scenarios. The first assumed a population and employment growth rate similar to historic trends in the region. A higher growth scenario was evaluated, as well, making assumptions about potential future growth, development, and travel behavior that are more optimistic and ambitious. Those growth rates assumed a certain level of transit-oriented development as a result of a new rail connection.

Public Survey Results

Findings from the public outreach process gathered valuable information, as well, namely that the majority of people (*ranging from 71 to 98 percent based on various data sets*) would use a passenger rail service if it were available between Lewiston-Auburn and Portland. Of those that would ride it, the most common trip purposes were for recreation/cultural events, shopping, and travel connections. When asked what would make them more likely to ride the train, the top responses included proximity to destination, a high frequency of service (many trains per day), a lower cost than driving and parking, and a direct train to Boston.

Propensity Results

The analysis indicated that there is latent demand for a transit connection between Lewiston-Auburn and Portland. The lower and upper limits of the ridership demand would depend largely on the level-of-service and connections that would be made. In order for that latent demand to be captured fully, a rail service would need to have the frequency similar to a commuter-based service.

Other elements that could improve the potential to capture the higher range of ridership potential include locating a station within proximity to major origins/destinations. Where proximity is not an option, “first and last mile” connections would be improved by ride-sharing services and better connections to Lewiston-Auburn’s and Portland’s existing network of bus routes.

In addition to convenience, the increased propensity to travel in the corridor could also result from closer economic ties between Lewiston-Auburn and Portland. The presence of a good rail connection increases the perception among residents and workers that the two areas are a single region rather than as two distinct and separate urban areas. This concept creates an affinity between the two places and a higher level of trip-making between them, a portion of which would be carried by rail.

Rail Ridership Propensity

	Near-Term Ridership Potential [projected to 2040]		Long-Term Ridership Potential [projected to 2040]	
	Daily Rail Trips		Daily Rail Trips	
	Low	High	Low	High
12-20 Transit-Style Service Trips	600	800	700	1900
Up to 4 Intercity-Style Service Trips	210	240	250	330