Thriving Communities Program Site Visits and Meetings Summaries

Midcoast Council of Governments (MCOG), Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission (LCRPC) and MidCoast Public Transportation (MCPT) were recently selected from over 200 applicants to receive two years of technical assistance through[US Department of Transportation’s Thriving Communities Program (TCP)](https://shoutout.wix.com/so/80Oyqu43H/c?w=o9b_msf3wmIqhk1sBeUX68Gd1hYXr5VMBYq58nYxkDc.eyJ1IjoiaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cudHJhbnNwb3J0YXRpb24uZ292L2dyYW50cy90aHJpdmluZy1jb21tdW5pdGllcyIsInIiOiIxMTQ4ZWZjOS0xZDM4LTRmYzUtNjA5OC0zYWQ4MmMxNGZkNTMiLCJtIjoibHAifQ). The focus of this program is designing and advancing transportation infrastructure projects that address critical social, economic, environmental, and mobility needs. The technical assistance is being provided by three staff members from two national non-profits: RCAP Solutions and the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).

To kick off the program, on Monday, September 30, and Tuesday, October 1, 2024, staff of all the organizations in this effort (MCOG, LCRPC, MCPT, RCAP Solutions, and NADO) completed a two-day driving and walking tour of the Midcoast from Brunswick to Searsport. This gave the external capacity building team a chance to see the transportation nuances and challenges of the region including its traffic congestion, tourist influence, and peninsula and island communities. Staff from Bath Iron Works, MaineDOT, and municipal staff from Bath, Camden, and Rockland joined for legs of the tour to provide local knowledge along the route to the out-of-state team. Key points were Cook’s Corner, the Knox County Regional Airport, Rockland Harbor Park, the Downtowns of Bath, Wiscasset, Damariscotta, Searsmont, Camden, and Belfast, and the Searsport Town Wharf.

As part of the two-day event, MCOG and LCRPC convened transportation stakeholders for four meetings: focus groups assembling municipal professionals and two community meetings bringing in citizens, bicycle and pedestrian advocates, and non-profit organization leaders. The focus groups were divided into the Bath, Brunswick, and Topsham and Thomaston through Searsport areas while the community meetings were separated by inland and coastal communities. The team used the information gathered from the two days of work to inform the technical assistance priorities for the next two to three years:

* A regional scale data dig and inventory of available transportation services and incentives in the Midcoast
* Establishing an improved workflow with MaineDOT to strengthen relationship between regional planning organizations, communities, and MDOT.
* Planning, funding, and beginning the process of implementing recommendations from a Midcoast regional transit feasibility study improving communications and public outreach regarding transportation options
* Accessibility/ADA compliance
* Education and culture shift away from personal vehicle dependency
* De-siloing of transportation service providers and stakeholders