

MINUTES OF MEETING OF July 16, 2024

Hampton Beach State Park Accessibility Feasibility Study
Focus Group – Transit Providers

DATE PREPARED: July 17, 2024

LOCATION: Virtual

ATTENDEES:	Camille Correa	Nashua Transit System (NTS)
	Lori Lorman	Nashua Transit System (NTS)
	Mike Whitten	Manchester Transit Authority (MTA)
	Cheryl Worsman	Manchester Transit Authority (MTA)
	Nicole Rogers	GPI

PURPOSE: Focus Group Meeting – Transit Providers

GPI led the discussion following a detailed Agenda. The meeting started with introductions followed by a project debrief and an open discussion period. The following topics were raised:

Discussion Topics:

1. Existing Service

- **MTA**
 - Uses 45-foot motor coaches for beach transit services
 - Ridership around 75 on rainy days and up to 220 passengers on peak sunny days
 - One Saturday per month (June (Sandcastles), July, August, September (Seafood Festival))
 - Fare is \$5
 - Operates multiple trips per day, with buses departing Manchester at 8:00 AM and 10:30 AM, and returning at 2:00 PM and 4:30 PM (providing some buffer for traffic)
 - Utilizes park-and-ride locations for bus parking due to lack of designated bus parking at beach
- **NTS**
 - Uses 35 -footer for beach transit services
 - Ridership of all ages (4 – 84), bikers, walkers, wheelchairs, etc.
 - One Saturday per month (June (Sandcastles), July, August, September (Seafood Festival))
 - Fare is \$10 (raised from \$5 last year – no complaints – people want to go!)
 - Busses depart Nashua Transit Center at 9:00 AM and 10:00 AM and depart Hampton at 3:30 PM
 - Typically will park across from Playland and load/unload there because circle is not always available

2. Current Barriers

- **Bus Stop Location**
 - Feedback from Survey “ Sometimes it can be very difficult to use the bus. Some days they can pull up to the sidewalk and it works great, but other days they get rushed

out and yelled at. There should be a regular spot where buses can drop off and pick up that has access to the sidewalk for people in wheelchairs.”

1. MTA reported that parks staff often rush the bus drop off process and sometimes buses are not allowed to pull up to the curb, complicating accessibility.
 2. NTS shared similar experiences, where buses are redirected or not allowed to drop-off passengers at convenient locations.
- Inconsistent drop-off procedures and limited space (tight angles) have resulted in scraped transit vehicles
 - Inconsistent drop-off/pick-up results in accessible amenities being further than desired (seating, shade, bathrooms, etc.)
- **Communication**
 - Lack of effective communication and coordination with frontline state park staff, leading to challenges in bus operations
 - Inconsistent information and support from state park staff regarding bus parking and drop-off
 - Transit providers are often met as an inconvenience especially during high peak times – have been asked to provide service on a weekday morning rather than peak Saturday but that’s when people want to go to beach when there are events etc. Limited fleet does not allow for weekday service as both providers are providing in-town service at those times.
 - **Parking**
 - Parking at beach for is difficult and inconsistent for busses.
 - The current process for obtaining parking passes for buses is complex and time-consuming, often requiring multiple steps and the use of different email addresses.
 - The online system for parking passes is cumbersome and prone to errors.
 - If able to park at beach, drivers can also enjoy (use bathroom, get food, etc.) however, if not, it’s a very uncomfortable and long day

3. Thoughts on Expanded Service

- Both would love to provide expanded service, but funding and resources (fleet and drivers) are extremely limited
- Currently provides weekend service only to Hampton because fleet is providing in-town service on weekdays
- Both open to additional stops if accessibility amenities were expanded throughout the park (i.e. North Beach and South Beach)
- Must consider traffic

4. Bus Stop Amenities

- Designated bus stop with clear signage, shade, and seating is lacking

5. Thoughts of Local Shuttle Service

- Both providers stated they think that would be beneficial in terms of providing greater access throughout the area (greatly expands accessible parking options)
- Referenced Seafood Festival as good example that provides free service from in-town municipal lots and utilizes school buses (this shuttle service is sponsored by FIRST Student)
- Look into NHDOT Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grants – 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individual with Disabilities Capital (Vehicle and Equipment) Program and Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) Program Funding for Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individual with Disabilities (<https://www.dot.nh.gov/projects-plans-and-programs/programs/fta-grants-related-information>)

6. Outreach of Services & Partnerships

- Both use website and social media to inform and engage the community about transit options and updates
- NTS markets their services at senior apartment complexes via flyers and newsletters
 - Important to note that cell phone use/social media not available or used by everyone. Many folks rely on bulletin board postings, etc. for information.
- MTA markets through MPOs and RCCs as well
- Word of mouth recommendations have significantly contributed to awareness and ridership increase

Recommendations Summarized:

• Designated Accessible Drop-Off/Pick-Up Points

- Identify and establish clearly marked, accessible bus drop-off and pick-up point to ensure direct access to accessible sidewalks and necessary amenities (bathrooms, shade, seating)
- Aim for reduction in incidents where passengers are rushed off buses or dropped off at inaccessible locations

• Improved Coordination/Training with State Parks Staff

- Enhance communication between transit providers and state park staff to ensure a welcoming and supportive environment for accessible transit
- Implement regular coordination meetings and establish clear protocols for bus drop-off/pick-up and parking
- Designate a dedicated liaison role within parks staff to facilitate communication and coordination with transit providers

• Streamlined Parking Pass System

- Simplify the process for obtaining parking passes for buses, possibly through a more user friendly online system that is intuitive and consistent in terms to fare pricing
- Consider public transit vehicles with government plates to be exempt from a state parking fee

• Additional Service + Funding

- Explore possibility of additional stops with Hampton Beach State Park if accessible services were expanded upon (South Beach, North Beach)
- Explore possibility of additional service (weekdays, more weekends) which would require funding and resources (fleet, drivers, etc.)
- Identify and apply for additional funding opportunities to support expanded transit services, such as NHDOT Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grants – 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individual with Disabilities Capital (Vehicle and Equipment) Program and Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) Program Funding for Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individual with Disabilities
- Implement a local shuttle bus service to connect off-site parking areas with key beach access points
 - Explore purchasing used school buses and adapting them for accessible shuttle use to reduce costs and increase availability
 - Seek partnerships with local organizations and benefactors to secure financial support for accessibility improvements
 - Multiple benefits: expanded accessibility and reduced parking congestion at beach. Improved mobility for visitors with disabilities, making it easier to visit HBSP

• Increased Accessible Amenities+ Signage

- Use clear and informative signage at bus stop locations to indicate destinations/routes and encourage public transit
 - Provide bus stop/route signage (similar to airport), i.e. route to Nashua, route to Manchester, etc.
- Enhance bus stop to include accessible seating and shade structure

- **Future Partnerships and Outreach**
 - Partner with third party to help manage accessibility program and bridge gaps between various stakeholders
 - Actively use social media to disseminate information about accessibility improvements and available resources
 - Collaborate with local organizations (MPOs, RCCs, Local senior apartment complexes, etc.) to promote accessibility and gather broader community feedback

Action Items:

- Nicole to follow up with email containing the meeting notes.
- Participants encouraged to take and share the survey within their networks.
- Suggestions for further groups to contact for more diverse input.

These minutes constitute our understanding of the discussions and conclusions reached. Please advise us within ten (10) days, in writing, of any exceptions or corrections.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole Rogers
Project Manager

cc: Robert White, GPI
Travis Pryor, GEI
Alison Brady, GEI