

# City, Counties and Regional Transit Systems: Governing Tips and Lessons Learned

Community Connector, Bangor ME

by Catherine Conlow



# Community Connector – Bangor ME



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# Community Connector-Bangor ME

- The City of Bangor has a population of slightly more than 33,000, which represents a 5% increase over the past decade, but is still below the 1970 population census.
- The City, with a daytime populations of over 53,000, is a regional center for retail, transportation, and service including medical.

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- Demographics

- Median Household Income - \$56,955, lower than the State and National Averages.
- Percentage of owner-occupied housing is 50%, lower than the State and National Averages.
- Poverty rate in Bangor is 25%, which is higher than the State Average of 17% and the National Average of 15%.
- Unemployment Rate – 6.9%, lower than the national average.

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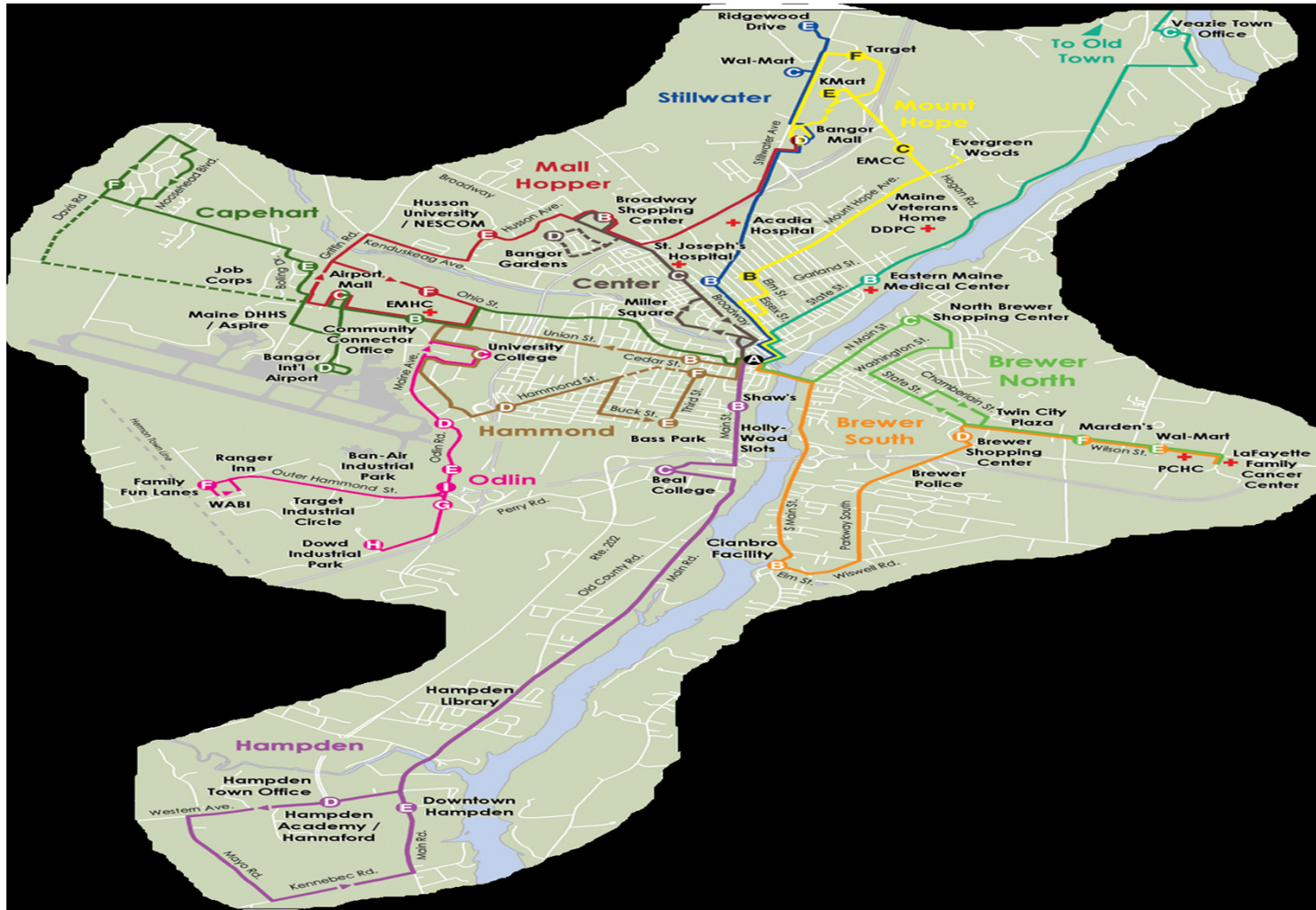
- Total employment within the City of Bangor is approximately 42,000.
- The City exports approximately 5,000 workers to neighboring municipalities and imports approximately 25,000 workers from the surrounding communities.



# Community Connector – Bangor ME

- The Community Connector is a fixed route public transit system operated by the City of Bangor for the communities of the Greater Bangor Urbanized Area.
- The Community Connector operates within the urbanized area of the six-member communities. The routes are within walking distance of 75% of the population of the six communities. The service area covers 103 miles of roadway (measured one-way only).
- Communities are served on a contractual basis and governance and operations are through the City of Bangor.

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- Total Ridership for the Community Connector in 2013 was 882,270, which is down slightly over the previous few years.
- Decrease in ridership is due in large part to reductions in MaineCare (Medicaid) reimbursements from the State.



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## Operating Funding – Expenditure Allocation

- Total budget is approximately \$3 million annually.
- Costs of the system are allocated to participating municipalities based on actual costs.
- Bus overhead is allocated proportionately based on the overall percentage of total expenses.
  - Eg. The cost of Bangor’s services represent 71% of the system. Bangor pays 71% of the Bus overhead and Bangor receives 71% of the Federal Subsidy.

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## Operating Funding - Revenues

- Federal Subsidies are also spread proportionately over the member municipalities.
  - Bangor collects 71% of federal subsidies.
- Rates are \$1.50 per ride across the system, a monthly pass for \$40 or a strip of 5 for \$6
- Rates collected at the fare box are attributed to the specific route.
- The difference between the subsidies and the fare box are paid through by participating municipality.
  - Eg. Bangor subsidizes bus route with \$438,652 in taxes
  - It has been adjusted mid year for drastic changes like fuel prices.

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## The City employs

- 2.5 office staff including Bus Superintendent
- 35 Bus Drivers -unionized
- Roughly 3,000 mechanic hours or approximately 1.5 FTE

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## Opportunities

- The City of Bangor is unique in that it is a small city with a regional transportation system.
- Very fortunate to have a regional bus system.
- Offers economic opportunity to those less fortunate.
- Supports Downtown Bangor as well as towns, Universities and services in other communities.



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## Opportunities

- Small system is more flexible (not withstanding Federal rules). No additional Governing Board or Transit Authority.
- Member municipalities have direct control over how much service is provided
- City has more flexibility in adjusting rates, tax support.
- Member Municipalities only pay for direct services and city does not charge an indirect over-head.

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## Opportunities

- Member municipalities have direct influence over how much service they purchase.
  - Orono and University of Maine added free shuttle service within their community. Benefits of participating in a transit system and flexibility made project feasible.



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## Opportunities

### – Agreements with Educational Institutions

- University of Maine, Husson University, and Eastern Maine Community College pay for unlimited free fares for students and staff
- Cuts down of need for parking and supports individuals without other means of transportation.

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## Challenges

- Hub System brings buses to single location.
  - Overcrowding of the hub as ridership and buses have grown in size. Avg. daily transfers at the HUB are 1,636.
  - Because of the Hub and the number of people in a single location, the site has attracted some questionable behavior in downtown Bangor.
  - Perception that the “Clientele” and activities are sketchy.
  - Perception of crowding and diesel fumes have had some deleterious effect on development of outside activities.

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## Challenges

- Small System with ½ hour to one-hour service.
- System operates 6 days a week.
- Service ends at 7:00 pm.
- Challenge for shift work and commuters.
- Any changes in hours of operations or days of operation may result in more significant declines in ridership.



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## Challenges

### – Operating Funding

- Tough economy – Reductions in Federal and State Funding is particularly tough on small system.
- Rely on rate increases, service reductions or general tax support.
- System operates on tight margins and is fragile. Significant changes in any of these supports may result in drastic changes in service delivery.

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- Challenges

- Capital Funding

- New Buses cost a minimum of \$400K per bus.
    - City has not been able to fund regular improvements
    - Fleet is old
    - City was able to acquire used buses from Westchester County NY.
    - Federal Funding priorities favor larger systems with higher ridership. Makes it difficult to compete for capital funding.

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## Challenges

### – Capital funding

- Funds lacking to invest in new technology such as natural gas buses and infrastructure to support natural gas busses at motor pool.

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## Lessons -

- Governance structure is good for small municipalities and regions because service can be structured to what is affordable for a community.
  - Communities can tailor services, within reason, to fit needs.
    - For example one member municipality has opted to eliminate Saturday service, which will reduce their overall costs and federal subsidies but will also reduce taxpayer support
    - Some have opted to look at expanded bus service which was added at the expense of the municipality.



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## Lessons

- Although it would be cheaper to spread costs across a greater tax base (County). Our funding is not tied to other communities that are not served
  - Member Municipalities pay the difference between expenses and (farebox + State and Federal subsidies). If the costs are too high there is flexibility in re-structuring their bus service.

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## Lessons

- System is affordable but very basic with limited financial opportunities for service or capital improvements.
- Would include the amortization of buses in the cost to member municipalities for the service.  
Dependent on federal programs to help pay for busses. Lack of Federal and State money means equipment is old and requires more maintenance.

# Questions/Comments?



The logo features the text "ICMA 100th ANNUAL CONFERENCE" centered against a light blue background with white fireworks. The "100" is in a large, blue, stylized font, with "th" in a smaller, orange, cursive font. "ICMA" is in a blue, sans-serif font above the "100". "ANNUAL CONFERENCE" is in a blue, sans-serif font below the "100".

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