

## Report to Council on Metro's Route 7 Nov. 23, 2009

### I. Mission for the Adhoc Falmouth Mass Transit Committee

When the Town Council issued its initial charge in Jan. 28, 2008, it asked the Adhoc Falmouth Mass Transit Committee to study all aspects of the Metro bus service in Falmouth. Upon the committee's recommendation in October, 2008, the Council authorized the town to join Portland and Westbrook as members of the Greater Portland Transit District, informally known as Metro. At that time, the Council also authorized adding a new route and creating a marketing campaign to encourage residents and employees to ride the bus.

This report is intended to update the Council on the activities of the last six months, since bus service was extended with six runs per day, Monday through Saturday, to the Town Landing neighborhood via Johnson Road and Route 88, beginning Monday, May 11, 2009. Bus service to OceanView was simultaneously reduced to seven runs per day in the mid-morning to early afternoon. Metro, with the cooperation of the Falmouth Shopping Center also created a parking area in front of the Old Shaw's for a Park and Ride lot.

### II. Marketing Campaign

In a joint venture with Metro and the business community -- particularly OceanView and Falmouth by the Sea, the town sent fliers to residents along the new bus and old bus route, took out ads in the Forecaster, held a kick-off party at O'Natural's and offered residents along the new route free monthly passes. All other residents were eligible for free Ten-Ride tickets. Notices about the new bus route were also advertised on the town's website and public access TV station. Falmouth Middle School children made posters about the bus for a scavenger hunt that involved more than 20 businesses in town. The winner, 13-year-old Calder Favreau, won an iPod Nano provided by OceanView. A video blitz for Cable TV and possibly the town's website is currently being produced with testimonials by bus riders.

### III. Impact of Route Change

Residents of OceanView have adjusted to the new schedule. There have been few if any complaints to the Town Office. Although Metro buses are not equipped to determine how many people board the bus at specific stops, bus drivers estimate there are 7-10 regular riders along the new route between Shaw's, north Route 1, Johnson Road, Route 88 and Depot Road. There are a few cars in the Park and Ride on a regular basis.

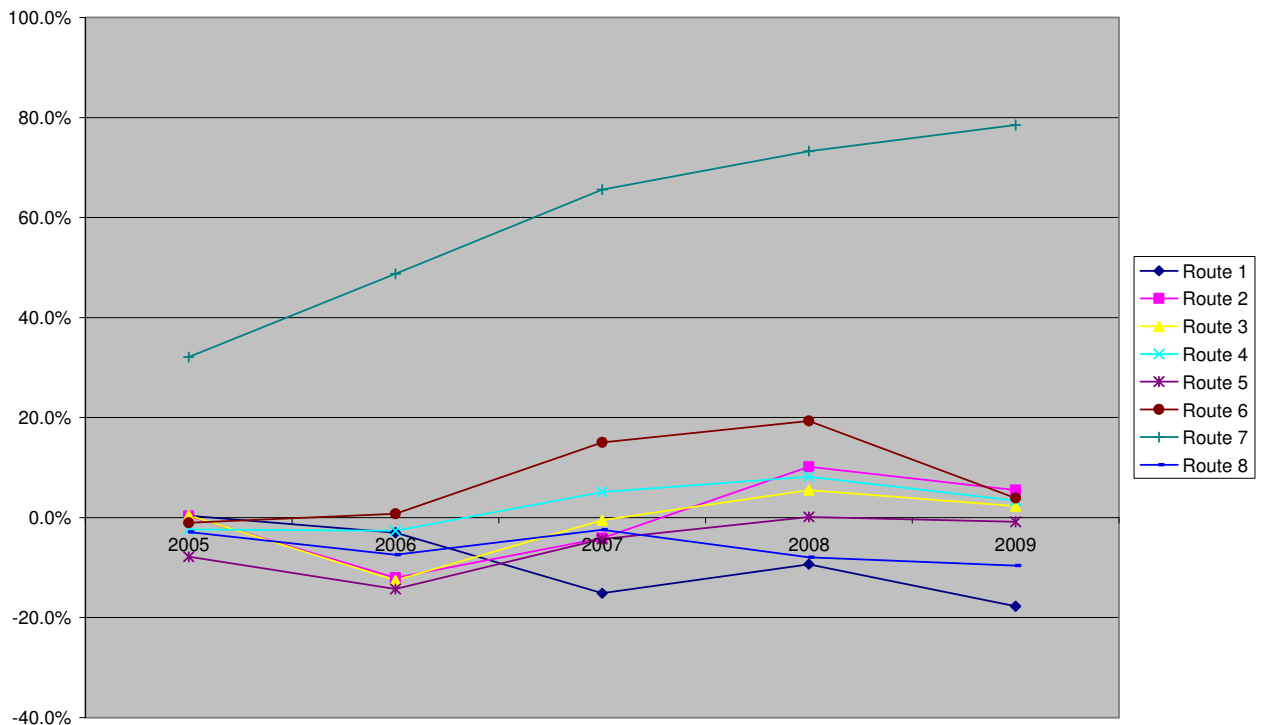
#### IV. Promotional Passes

As part of the marketing campaign, Metro offered free monthly passes to residents along the new route so they could familiarize themselves with riding the bus. The number of passes distributed was: May, 58; June, 66; July, 36; August, 32; September, 16 and October, 12. Sixty-five free Ten-Ride tickets, subsidized by businesses, were also distributed to Falmouth riders outside the new route.

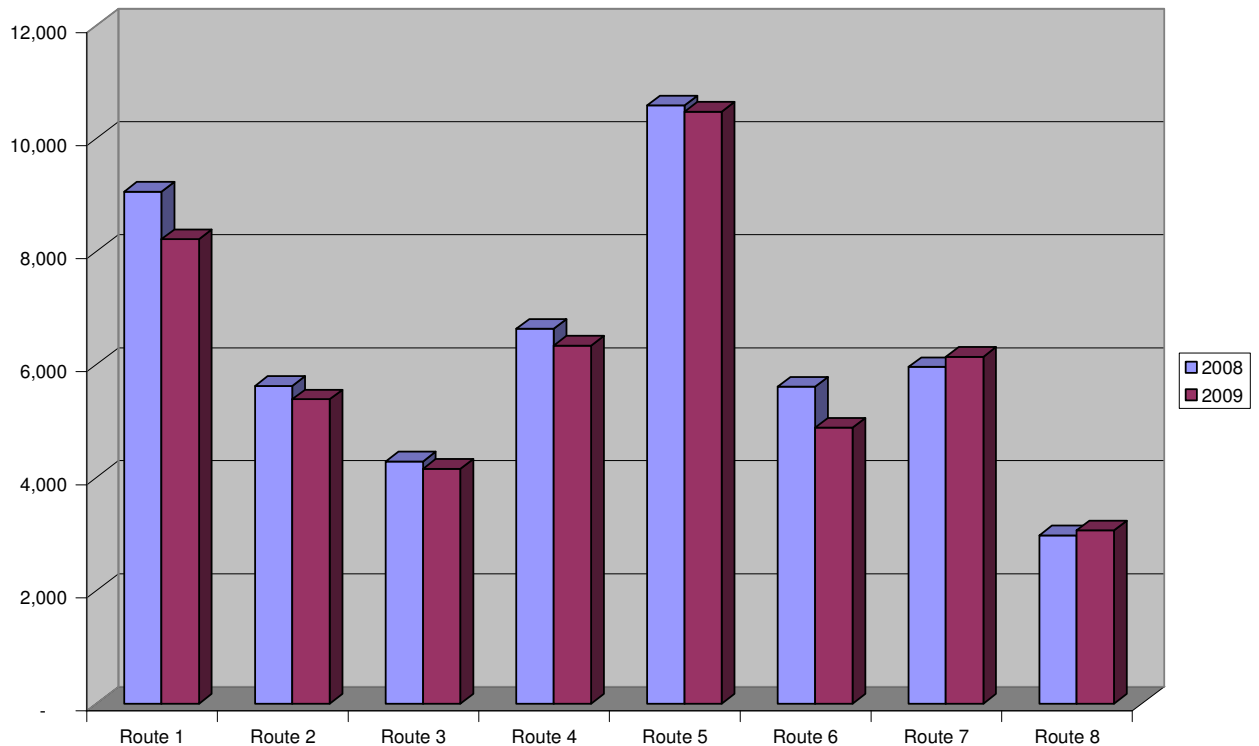
#### IV. Ridership Figures

Ridership statistics provided by Metro and analyzed by town staff show the average monthly ridership on Route 7 has increased every year since Metro bus service began in 2004. Also, only Route 7, out of eight Metro routes, has not had a decrease over the last six years. (See Graph 1). The statistics also show that, although the Route 7 is the newest route in the system and the only route with one-hour frequency -- (the others run at least every 30 minutes), Route 7 is in the middle of Metro's eight routes as far as average riders per bus. (See Graph 2).

Graph 1 - Cumulative Percent Gain/Loss - 2004 Base Year



**Graph 2 - Average Monthly Riders per Bus**



This table is a comparison of ridership growth/decline between Route 7 and all other Metro Routes.

	--- Route 7 ---		--- Metro (excl. Rt. 7) ---	
	Riders	% Change	Riders	% Change
May 2008 through October 2008	37,656	N/A	709,800	N/A
May 2009 through October 2009	38,748	2.9%	650,374	-8.4%

During the past six months with the new route in Falmouth, ridership has increased by 2.9%, or 1,092 riders over May through October in 2008. Meanwhile the rest of the Metro routes dropped by 8.4 percent. It is difficult to know why the Falmouth route has performed so much better than the other routes in the last six months but the free passes are likely a contributing factor. A clearer picture will emerge when the passes are no longer available.

The town has not initiated its own onboard survey in recent years to determine whether riders are Falmouth residents, why they ride the bus and where they go

on the bus. Rather than spend additional funds, the town chose to use as a base survey, one conducted by the Greater Portland Council of Governments in 2008. That survey records only each stop where riders board and disembark and is required by federal regulations. A follow-up survey is scheduled to be conducted this spring, funded by Metro.

#### V. Standards for Judging Ridership

There are no standards for judging ridership growth of a bus system as small as Metro's and definitely not for a single route. The standard used by the Federal Transit Administration for much larger transit agencies is an annual growth of 1.9 percent. If that standard is applied to the Route 7, Route 7 exceeds it.

Maine's Department of Transportation has concluded that the Route 7 meets its standards, according to its evaluation under the Job Access- Reverse Commute federal program.

#### VI. Demand for the Bus

During this six-month period, the demand for the bus has increased and it has become an expected service, used in making business decisions that also help the economic development of our community. Tidewater, OceanView and Falmouth by the Sea advertise bus service in their brochures to draw potential customers. When Falmouth Shopping Center officials last summer discussed the possibility of a medical office building moving to the Old Shaw's, they mentioned that it would be helpful to have the Metro bus transport employees and patients.

Residents at Applegate, which is on the new route, notified Councilors that they appreciate having bus service but they asked for more frequency. A business owner north of Johnson Road has also expressed interest in bus service.

#### VII. Falmouth Green Ribbon Commission

During this period the Falmouth Green Ribbon Commission has issued its draft report for a 2009 Climate Action Plan, which points out that the largest sector generating carbon emissions in Falmouth is Transportation. In support of mass transit, the report urges town government to reduce "vehicle miles traveled" by "encouraging alternatives to single person occupant cars for commuting."

#### VIII. Next Steps

The Adhoc Falmouth Mass Transit Committee unanimously concluded at its meeting Nov. 16, 2009 to recommend that the Council continue its membership in Metro for another year. To withdraw from Metro, the Council must give one year's notice by Jan. 1.

There will be discussion about the town's financial commitment to Metro and level of service during budget discussions in 2009.

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