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COAST LOOKS AT UPCOMING BUDGET CHALLENGES

*Dover, NH--*Responding to decreasing overall federal public transit funding, increased operating costs and ADA service demands that come with well-known regional demographic changes, COAST, the region’s leading public transportation provider, is undertaking a comprehensive analysis of its operation to address services that will be in jeopardy as their Little Bay Bridge construction mitigation project ends.

In the last 10 years, operating costs have increased 37% while Federal revenue has only increased 15%. In addition, while fixed route ridership has increased, demand for ADA-related advance reservation services has increased 881%. These services are only part of an underfunded infrastructure for New Hampshire’s working-class families, elderly and disabled populations.

Noted COAST Executive Director Rad Nichols, “We are experiencing a perfect storm of increased cost, increased demand, and with the Little Bay Bridge project coming to an end, decreases in funding streams. We’re one of 11 public transportation systems across the Granite State who are addressing these dramatic shifts and without additional funding from Federal and state resources, such as the Federal Transit Administration and the state budget, we’ll likely be forced to make dramatic changes to schedules and routes in the coming years. Our member communities cannot be expected to carry this burden alone.”

Organizations across the state who support both a strong NH workforce and an aging population, recognize that public transportation systems give seniors and workers alike the freedom to live and thrive in the Granite State. State Director of AARP New Hampshire Todd Fahey has recently noted that “it’s important to have various transportation options – public and private.  New Hampshire is an aging state and we know that residents want to stay in their homes and communities as they age.  A key part of “aging in place” is designing livable communities, communities that are good for all ages, and a key part of such communities is for residents to have transportation options other than only one’s car.”

Executive Director of the Workforce Housing Coalition Sarah Wrightsman, said, “We speak often with business leaders about the relationship between housing and staffing, but we rarely get to highlight the connection to transportation. In a recent conversation with a large Portsmouth-based employer, the issue of transportation was at the center of their concerns. These issues are all intimately intertwined and are plaguing our local economy.”

Somersworth Economic Development Director Robin Comstock said, “As Somersworth grows, we’re being asked by both investors and developers to focus on public transportation systems that prove critical to connect any one of our communities to a vital and dynamic region. Public transportation is an economic development issue. Access affects the perception of desirability of each of our communities and the region. Our employers, their workforce, residents, and our investors and COAST expands our ability to keep, attract and grow our area business by keeping and creating jobs.”

COAST will be working in the coming weeks with communities and elected officials to identify additional potential sources of support and revenue. Added Nichols, “We are committed to supporting our customers. Public transportation is a critical resource for thousands of NH residents to maintain the ability to work, access healthcare, and maintain the quality of life that we all value in New Hampshire.”

In recent years COAST has become synonymous with high-quality services provided by a dedicated workforce who is committed to its customers. Once a very small employer in the region, the non-profit organization now employs roughly 75 individuals.

The Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST) champions and provides customer-focused public transportation with a commitment to excellence in safety and service.

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