



\*\*\*\*\* **For Immediate Release** \*\*\*\*\*

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## **Record-high Diesel Prices Prompt a Proposed Fare Increase**

**Dover, NH** – In an effort to partially offset record-high diesel prices and other rising operational expenses, a fare increase is being proposed for implementation on January 2, 2009. The Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation's (COAST's) base cash fare is proposed to increase from \$1.00 to \$1.50 on all bus routes and a \$.50 fare is proposed for implementation on the Pease-Portsmouth Trolley routes. Public hearings will be held throughout COAST's service area to solicit public input on the proposed fare increase. COAST is the seacoast's publically financed transit system.

The proposed fare increase at COAST would be consistent with similar increases taking place at public transit systems across the country in response to rapidly rising fuel costs. In a recent report published by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) titled *Rising Fuel Costs: Impacts on Transit Ridership and Agency Operations* public transit systems across the nation are reporting significant increases in ridership while at the same time struggling with the means to absorb surging fuel costs. As a result, more than half the nation's transit agencies are raising fares.

Rad Nichols, COAST Executive Director, affirmed, "The demand for public transit in the seacoast is the highest it's ever been in our 26 year history. With the financial support of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and local communities we serve, we are looking to continue to expand and improve services as COAST has done repeatedly in the last few years."

This will be the first time since 1994 that COAST has proposed a systemwide fare increase. "We have focused on keeping our fares very affordable to encourage maximum use," stated Nichols. "We continue to focus on this goal. However, we must reassess our fares to determine whether or not they are the most equitable to all parties involved (e.g., passengers, federal, state and local governments), including the eleven communities that help fund our services."

COAST last changed its fare structure in 2004 when it eliminated its multi-tier/zone based cash fare system. The January 2004 change was implemented in an effort to simplify the COAST fare structure, ease the use of public transportation and ultimately increase ridership. All of these objectives were subsequently achieved almost immediately after the 2004 fare change.

### Proposed Increase

The proposed fare increase would raise a one-way cash fare (the base fare) on COAST buses to \$1.50, a \$0.50 increase from the current \$1.00. Cash fares for the elderly and disabled, set at half the base fare, would increase to \$0.75.

At the same time a one-way cash fare on COAST trolleys serving the Pease Tradeport and Portsmouth, currently free, would be set at \$.50. Cash fares for the elderly and disabled, set at half the base fare, would be \$0.25.

The comparable fares for COAST's complementary ADA paratransit services would range from \$1.00 to \$3.00 depending on route(s) of travel. Currently comparable fares range from no fare to \$2.00.

Monthly passes, good on all COAST and Wildcat Transit buses, would increase from \$35 to \$52. The monthly pass program discount rate would stay the same at 17%. This assumes the user takes 42 trips over the course of the month, or two trips a day over 21 days. Given the higher total cost of a monthly pass, COAST is also considering implementing a \$20, 15-ride punch pass. COAST will consider rider feedback when determining whether to introduce this new fare medium.

To put the fare change at COAST in context with public transit fares in the rest of the nation, in 2004, the last year for which a comprehensive set of data is available, the average adult base cash fare in the U.S. was \$1.37 (source: APTA).

### Financial Impacts

The proposed fare increase would help cover a significant portion of COAST's increased expenses related to rising fuel costs. Estimates are that the additional revenues generated would equal approximately \$70,000. As a percentage of the overall operating budget, fares represent 8% of total revenues at COAST.

COAST purchases approximately 76,500 gallons of bio-diesel (B10) annually (There is currently no price differential between bio-diesel and straight diesel). The average price paid per gallon for bio-diesel in fiscal year (FY) 2007 was \$2.19 (Oct. 2006 – Sept. 2007).

COAST started FY08 (October 1, 2007) paying \$2.75 per gallon for diesel, a 25.3% increase from the FY07 average. As of July 2008, COAST was paying \$4.29 per gallon, a 56.3% increase from the start of the fiscal year. These increases are anticipated to add a total of \$113,000 in fuel costs for the current fiscal year, ending September 30.

## Public Hearings

COAST staff and members of the Board of Directors will be holding a series of eleven hearings throughout the region to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the proposed changes. Details on the meeting locations, dates and times can be found below.

Community	Hearing Location	Date	Time(s)
Farmington	Farmington Rec. Dept. Gymnasium	Tue., Oct. 14	10:00 - 11:00 am
Rochester	City Hall Council Chambers	Tue., Oct. 14	4:30 - 5:30 pm 7:00 - 8:30 pm
Somerset	City Hall Council Chambers	Wed., Oct. 15 Thu., Oct. 16	11:00 am - 12:00 pm 7:00 - 8:30 pm
Dover	City Hall Auditorium	Mon., Oct. 20	1:00 - 2:00 pm 7:30 - 9:00 pm
Portsmouth	Public Library Levenson Room	Tue., Oct. 21	2:00 - 3:00 pm 7:00 - 8:30 pm
Exeter	Public Library	Wed., Oct. 22	12:30 - 1:30 pm
Newmarket	Town Hall Auditorium	Wed., Oct. 22	3:00 - 4:00 pm

Notices announcing the hearings will appear in area newspapers; are available on the COAST web site, [www.coastbus.org](http://www.coastbus.org); and will be posted on all COAST buses. Information on traveling to and from hearings via the COAST bus system can also be found on the web site.

For those who cannot attend the hearings, COAST is accepting written comments/testimony through email, [fares@coastbus.org](mailto:fares@coastbus.org), and by mail at COAST, 42 Sumner Drive, Dover, NH 03820. All written comments/testimony submitted prior to October 23, 2008 will be made part of the hearing record.

*COAST is Seacoast NH's public, non-profit transit system, and has proudly served residents of the area since 1982 with safe, convenient and affordable transit service. Riding the bus or trolley is fun, simple and green. Call today or visit COAST's web site at [www.coastbus.org](http://www.coastbus.org) to find out more about how easy public transit is to use.*

*Riding and supporting public transit is one of the best ways to advocate for expanded public transit services in the future, and ever more convenient and affordable alternatives to driving your car.*